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LESSER LIGHTS

OR,

MINOR CHARACTERS
OF SCRIPTURE



BY THE REV FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.



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LESSER LIGHTS;

OR,

*SOME OF THE MINOR CHARACTERS OF SCRIPTURE
TRACED WITH A VIEW TO INSTRUCTION
AND EXAMPLE.*

THIRD SERIES. •

BY THE

REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.,

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LESSER LIGHTS.

THIRD SERIES.



INTRODUCTION.

IF there be any object that intercepts the light, then, wherever there is light, there is also shade. In every landscape there is both light and shade. A mountain, a tree, a house, casts a shade. And as there are lesser lights, so are there lesser shades ; even a blade of grass throws its shadow on the ground.

So is it with the characters of Scripture. There are some great lights, and some great shades ; prominent characters, for good or for ill. And there are also lesser lights and shades ; those made by the less prominent characters. Some of these are only just mentioned, but the little that is said of them is all in praise ; others appear on the scene for a moment, but all in *shade* ; as warnings, not examples.

When there is a strong light on the landscape, the shadows are strong in proportion ; when the

light is dim, the shadows also are less deep. And, though light and shade are always present, yet, when these are faint, the eye fixes more on the objects themselves—the mountain, the tree, the house, the blade of grass—than on the effects of light and shade.

In like manner characters are not always in strong contrast. In some cases the scenery (so to speak), the circumstances, the incidents and events, come more into notice than the characters of the persons concerned; much is said of the circumstances, little of the characters. Yet the persons are the more important, and they are moulded and influenced by the circumstances.

“Lesser *lights*” do therefore include lesser *shades*. And in some of the chapters that follow, the picture is in shadow rather than in light, the characters being set forth in the way not of example but of warning. A very slight mention of a person, a very short description of some event in a life, is often sufficient to instruct, encourage, or warn.

This third series of lesser lights is written in the same general plan as the first and second; but here, in some instances, not individuals, but groups, form the subject; and in others, not the whole life and character of the person (himself perhaps a greater light) but some minor incident in his life is set forth.



LUZ CHANGED TO BETHEL.

JACOB himself is one of the greater characters of Scripture ; but the change of the name of a place is not in itself a great event. In the change from Luz to Bethel, the patriarch shines to us as a lesser light.

In his fear of Esau, Jacob went in hot haste from Beersheba, and travelled so fast that on the first day he put forty miles between himself and his brother ; for it is evident that it was on the first night of his journey that he slept at Bethel. We read, "and Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran ; and he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night" (Gen. xxviii. 10, 11). This "certain place" was Bethel.

But it was not then called Bethel ; when Jacob lay down to rest the name of the place was *Luz* ; Jacob himself changed its name next day, from what happened there in the night.

What sort of place was it ? There must have been some reason for Jacob choosing it ; tired as he

was with his forty miles' walk, he would yet make choice of the best place he could find. It was in the hill-country, and there were trees there, and stones. We read elsewhere of a palm-tree there (Judges iv. 5); and of "the oak of Bethel"—called *Allon-bachuth*, "the oak of weeping," from Rebekah's nurse being buried beneath it; and further, we read of a *forest* there (2 Kings ii. 24). But this is not all. The old name of the place is the name of a tree; *Luz* means an almond-tree. Perhaps therefore it was a fertile place, with forest-trees and fruit-trees.

Yet, on the other hand, it was in the hill-country, and the ground was stony. The *forest* may have been a wild and rocky district, with no great number of trees; only *one* palm-tree is mentioned, "the palm-tree of Deborah"; and only *one* oak-tree (or *terebinth*), the "oak of weeping." And it is quite possible that, in that high and stony region, one lone almond-tree gave the name to the place. The almond-tree thrusts its roots into the crevices of rocks, and is sometimes found growing in an unlikely situation, with little depth of earth. We may picture, as a main feature in the scene, one fine almond-tree occupying some prominent position, and covered with its beautiful pink blossoms, before the leaves of other trees were unfolded. Such a tree might well give its name to the place: "the name of that city was called *Luz* at the first" (Gen. xxviii. 19).

Stones were all around; Jacob had no difficulty

in finding one for his pillow ; and amid them grew the beautiful almond-tree. It was less a place for a grove than for a single tree ; it was probably a tree, not a wood or an orchard, that gave the name.

But, however the name arose, it was now changed. The people near might still call the place *Luz* ; but to Jacob it was henceforth *Bethel*, and so it is to us. *Luz* is little to us, but *Bethel* is much.

For *Bethel* means "the House of God" ; and the name was given by Jacob, because on that memorable night God appeared to him in a vision, and vouchsafed His presence, and gave him great promises. Jacob saw in his dream, "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven ; and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it," and then He spoke to Jacob.

The impression made on him was such that on awaking from sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not ! And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place ! This is none other but *the House of God*, and this is the gate of heaven." Then he took his pillow-stone, and set it up, and consecrated it with oil, and made a solemn vow to God, and called the place *Bethel*. And *Bethel* it was to him from that day, and as *Bethel* it is written in the Book of God, and *Bethel* it is to us.

The name was changed for a reason. A common name was changed to a special name ; a name

derived from nature to one drawn from the presence of God. Luz was a natural name ; Bethel a spiritual.

How happy is it, when the House of God is a *Bethel* to us indeed, a House where God is in truth ! No mere beauty of form or ornament can give to any building "the beauty of holiness." The presence of the Holy One alone can give that. The almond-tree was lovely ; but it was the presence of God that made the place lovely to Jacob. Sometimes a change takes place in those who frequent the House of God ; one to whom the place of worship was once only *Luz* finds it to become *Bethel* to him. He used to admire the architecture and take pleasure in the music ; but now he loves to worship the Lord, and hear His word ; now Luz becomes Bethel.

Bethel was ever after that night a memorable place in Jacob's mind. All its outward features were stamped on his memory—the situation, the stones, the tree : but, far more the vision and the promise.

Some of *us* have had such times—times of the peculiar presence of God.

One person can remember a day when he sat alone on a rock in a forest, and read the Bible, and prayed in secret, and had many thoughts : God was very near to him that day : and still the scene itself is fresh in his mind's eye—the rock, the steep path, the forest-trees, the distant view—but the *Luz* is turned into *Bethel* by that presence which he

enjoyed. He remembers the scene, but much more the presence.

Another can think of a day in his room, or a night on his bed, when such a nearness to God was given him. In his case there is little to remember in the scene itself; the room was his accustomed room, the bed was where he always slept; there was no *Luz*, no beautiful almond-tree; yet, as the scene of close intercourse with God, the place itself is remembered, and all its circumstances. The room became more to him than ever it was before, the presence of God gave it a new interest.

But no mere place will ever be thus changed and hallowed in our memory, unless our *heart* receive God. The heart is where God comes and dwells. Then the heart is a true Bethel. That very heart may once not have known God; it may have been a *Luz* formerly; other things occupied it, but only worldly things, natural things, beautiful some of them, but without the presence of God. His presence changes all. The person is the same, his character, his natural bent, his temper and disposition; but a new presence is there, which has transformed all. Old things have become new. It is *Luz* still, but *Luz* is turned into Bethel.

Can we do anything, that with us *Luz* may become Bethel? In Jacob's case God did all. Jacob slept when God appeared thus to him. But we may *seek*. In this our *Luz*, in the home where we dwell, in this our resting-place, amid our outward

surroundings, in our present state of heart, we may seek God, that He may come to us, visit us, abide with us, transform us. The ladder is set up from earth to heaven. By Christ our Lord we may ascend to the throne ; and He is there to plead for us. We may ask, and we shall receive. God will manifest Himself to us, come to us, dwell with us, and change our Luz to Bethel by His presence.

Luz is not a completely happy place ; it wants something. Our natural life, our outward condition, may have an attractiveness of its own, as Jacob's Luz had ; but it must become Bethel to be truly happy, for without God it cannot be so. Till Luz become Bethel, true happiness will not be ours.

But more than the name must be changed. In this case the name was changed, because of a change that had happened to the place, God had come there : let none think to change their Luz into Bethel by anything short of this. It is not the hearing or speaking of the things of God, it is not associating with those who know Him and enjoy His presence, it is not the taking part with them in things which belong to His service and tend to promote His glory, it is nothing of this sort that will make Luz to be Bethel ; this would be only to change the *name*. The *place* must be changed by the presence of God there ; His indwelling presence by the Spirit. God said of old, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor. vi. 16) ; and our Saviour said, "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John

xv. 4). He will surely fulfil every word of promise. He will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. He will come, and make His abode with us. By His presence He will change us, giving us a new heart, and making us new creatures. This is more than a new profession, or a change of name; this is a real change, the heart that once was but *Luz*, a mere natural heart, now becomes *Bethel*, a House of God.



ABINADAB.

THERE are several of this name in Scripture. The second son of Jesse was Abinadab (1 Sam. xvi. 8); another of the name was son-in-law to Solomon (1 Kings iv. 11): but the best known is that Abinadab of Kirjath-jearim, in whose house the Ark of God was for many years.

When the men of Beth-shemesh were smitten for looking into the Ark, in their terror they sent to the people of Kirjath-jearim to take it away, and they went and fetched it, "and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill" (1 Sam. vii. 1).

Why into that house, rather than another? We may believe, because Abinadab wished it. He offered his house, and was, we may suppose, a chief mover in bringing the Ark to that place. Not only so, but he allowed Eleazar his son to be "sanctified to keep the Ark of the Lord"; in some way, approved by God, he was set apart for this service.

In the house of Obed-edom the Ark remained but three months, but during that time "the Lord

blessed Obed-edom, and all his household" (2 Sam. vi. 11)¹. In the house of Abinadab it was for above forty years, all the time from Eli to David. The account in the seventh chapter of the first book of Samuel seems to give only half that time; "it came to pass, while the Ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long, for it was twenty years"; but we must take that in connexion with the words that follow: "and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." The meaning seems to be, that for the first twenty years the people either forgot the Ark, or did not care for its absence from the Tabernacle; but that at the end of that time they awoke to a better feeling, and began to lament after the Lord, and to grieve for the want of that visible token of His presence. Yet after this they had to wait twenty or five-and-twenty years more before the Ark was restored to its place.

We all know the effect of years in making us used to any state of things. To live twenty years in one house puts the former home into the background of our life; all our thoughts and feelings have so long been associated with the present home. Yet more, if the time has been long—as long as forty or five-and-forty years. In that long time Abinadab and his family became accustomed to the presence of the Ark. As years went on, they almost forgot the time when it was not there. It solemnized their minds. It gave them an abiding

¹ See *Lesser Lights*, first series, p. 99.

sense of God's nearness. If Abinadab at first received the Ark gladly, we may believe that the feeling deepened with years, and that his reverence and piety grew with time.

We are not told expressly of a blessing coming to him, as to Obed-edom and his house. But if a three months' presence was blest, would forty years be without blessing? The presence of God cannot fail to bless; and the Ark was the symbol of His presence.

When first it came, Abinadab was no longer a young man, for he had a grown-up son; he was probably not less than forty years old. Whether he was still living when the Ark was fetched away by David, we are not told; if so, his age must have been eighty or eighty-five. He is not mentioned again, probably he was dead. In that case, never after once receiving it did he know his house without the Ark. When he was taken, the Ark was left.

The servant of God, who seeks and enjoys that presence of which the Ark was the symbol, never loses it. He grows old with that presence; as his strength declines, that presence is still his; when he draws his last breath, he does it in that presence, and only to go to a presence yet closer. He cannot, when he goes hence, leave the presence of God in his house, as Abinadab may have left the Ark. We cannot bequeath grace, or make sure that when we are gone our house will still be a house of prayer and the abode of God; but we may do much to bring this about. The last breath

of many a Christian has been spent in exhorting those he leaves behind, or in commending to them the work of God in the world.

The right effect of so long an abiding of the Ark in the house was that it should become continually dearer and more sacred, and so probably it did become to Abinadab. But was this the case with his sons? Often "familiarity breeds contempt," in sacred as well as in common things; and it may be that the sons of Abinadab, accustomed all their life to see the Ark in its place, came in time to look on it as little different from a piece of furniture. Abinadab himself received the Ark into his house out of zeal for God; but perhaps his sons, then young men, did not share the feeling: and it has a deadening effect on the mind, to have to do continually with the outward and visible parts of religion, while the heart is not interested. It may be that Eleazar, the first-named of the sons of Abinadab, and that one to whom the charge of the Ark was given, was the eldest; of him we read no more; when, after five-and-forty years, it was removed, he, as well as his father, may have been no more. But two brothers, younger brothers probably, then for the first time appear; and one of them in a terrible light.

If Abinadab was still alive, he was quite an old man; if Eleazar was still in charge, he was not young. Supposing them to have been still living, it was awful news that came to them soon after the Ark left the house. It had been carried

away in a new cart, drawn by oxen, "and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart." Ahio, whom we may suppose the younger, went before the Ark; Uzzah evidently walked beside it. The road was rough, and when they came to the threshing-floor of Nachon (or Chidon) the oxen, in drawing it, shook the Ark, or (as the word may mean) stumbled, and Uzzah put out his hand to steady it. But Uzzah was neither priest nor Levite, and none besides were to presume to lay hand on it. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and He smote him, because he put his hand to the Ark; and there he died before God" (1 Chron. xiii. 10). This was the news that reached the house of Abinadab, this was what the father and brother (if still living), heard. The news soon arrived, for the distance was but ten or twelve miles, and the Ark had not been many hours gone. It had been parted with not without sorrow, though a sorrow mixed with gladness that it was to be restored to its place in the Tabernacle: it would be missed from its accustomed place, the house would seem lonely without it; would not a blessing be lost with the departure of the Ark? But all such feelings were swallowed up in the shock of this news, and in the fear and grief that followed. A few hours only, and Uzzah had left home strong and well; and now he was no more, struck down by the hand of God.

How quickly a change may come! It wants but the putting forth of the hand of God, and something

may happen which alters the whole life. He does not tell us beforehand what He is about to do. One may leave the house in the morning, to be brought back a corpse in the evening. Such things do happen in common life; but never without a voice from God to those who remain.

But was not this a tremendous judgement for so small a fault—death for a *touch*, and a touch rightly meant, to keep the Ark from falling?

Was it a small fault? Let us consider. A fault is to be judged, not by the outward action so much as by the motive. God could read Uzzah's heart; God knew exactly *why* he did this thing; and it was God who smote him. This is enough for those who know and love God. The Judge of all the earth will, they are sure, do right; He who judges "*all the earth*," including the hearts of men.

But besides, the act of Uzzah was an act of positive disobedience. None might lay a hand on the Ark save the priests and Levites; and even they with restrictions. When the Ark was removed from one place to another, the priests were first to cover it; then the Levites were to carry it by its staves; "but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die" (Num. iv. 15). If Uzzah had been a Levite, he might not, under pain of death, have touched the Ark; but there is nothing to show that he was even a Levite.

He knew the commandment (every Israelite of his time did), and he disobeyed it. He knew what was said of even a Levite who should touch the

Ark; yet he touched it. He knowingly broke the law of God. To put out his hand and touch the Ark seems but a light thing; but to do so in direct disobedience to God was no light thing.

But did he not do it to save the Ark from falling? Yes; but what was this but to do evil that good might come? And we know what is said of such: "Whose damnation (condemnation, or judgement) is just" (Rom. iii. 8). Saul excused his disobedience on much the same ground; he had kept the cattle for a sacrifice to the Lord. But what was Samuel's answer? "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22).

Perhaps however Abinadab never knew of his son's end. It may be that he had long been dead; and that he died, leaving the Ark in his house, and still held in reverence there. If so, he was "taken from the evil to come." It is so sometimes in the dealings of God. Not seldom does it happen that godly parents are taken away before the transgression, and perhaps the sad end, of a child. Well is it for us that we cannot foresee what is coming. God causes things to happen in the order appointed by Him. If some sore judgement must fall, often does He remove beforehand some who could hardly have borne so heavy a stroke falling on one they loved.



JONATHAN'S ARMOUR-BEARER.

GIVEN Jonathan, hero as he was, was but a "lesser light" in relation to David, his friend and companion ¹. Jonathan's armour-bearer was less still. But, just as in the sky above us, the greater lights are but two, while those which to our eye appear the lesser are countless in number, so, in life, the great are but few while the little are many. So that, while it is true that the very greatest characters of Scripture are set forth for our instruction and example, yet the lesser seem from one point of view especially fitted to teach us, because they are not so far above us. The lessons we learn from them may be less important, but they come home to us the more, from teacher and learner being more on a level.

Besides, a "lesser light" may shine very brightly, and there are no characters set forth in Scripture, however insignificant in comparison with some

¹ See *Lesser Lights*, second series, p. 122.

others, from whom something may not be learnt, in the way either of pattern or of warning. Jonathan's armour-bearer may teach us something.

We read of "a little lad," who carried Jonathan's "artillery," his bow and arrows, when he went into the field to meet David (1 Sam. xx), but that little lad cannot have been the same as the armour-bearer of whom we read in chapter xiv. The one was only a boy, the other a man; the one was but a porter, the other was a soldier.

For the ancient armour-bearer seems to have corresponded with the squire of the middle ages. As the squire attended the knight, so did the armour-bearer the ancient warrior. But the squire did not keep out of the fight; he was at the knight's side in the thick of the battle, and a faithful squire has been known to come between his master and the lance or sword of the enemy, and save his lord's life at the cost of his own. In like manner, the armour-bearer was a warrior, fighting by his master's side.

Jonathan, as son of the king, was sure to have the pick of the young men in choosing his armour-bearer. Himself a hero, he would have a hero at his side. The story of the exploit of Jonathan and his armour-bearer shows that Jonathan had chosen well (1 Sam. xiv).

Saul and his people were hard pressed by the Philistines. Most of the people were in hiding, there were but three thousand fighting men with Saul. These he divided, keeping two thousand with him, and placing one thousand under the

command of Jonathan. Even these were but half-armed ; only Saul and Jonathan had spear and sword ; the rest had but ploughshares, and coulters, and axes, and mattocks.

Jonathan and his thousand were not with Saul. But probably, at the time of this exploit, his thousand was much diminished, for Saul's two thousand had fallen to six hundred. Jonathan had therefore but a little band with him, when he proposed to his armour-bearer to cross the ravine that separated them from the Philistines, and climb the rock, and make an assault on their garrison.

Jonathan wanted no one else ; he and his armour-bearer would make the attempt alone ; a larger number would draw attention. But Jonathan knew his man, and chose him from all the rest. Not even Saul was to know. This is the account : " Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father." In short, he told no one. " The people knew not that Jonathan was gone." It was a service of great danger ; a steep rock was to be scaled, and partly at least in the enemy's view. But the armour-bearer did not hang back ; wherever Jonathan would go, he would go. Jonathan seems to have invited him twice, and the second call was more explicit than the first. " Come," said he, " and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised : it may be that the Lord will work for us ; for

there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." This was the armour-bearer's answer: "Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart."

There is more implied in this answer than a mere willingness to go. In old times a Scottish clansman would go wherever the head of his clan called him to go; and now, among savage tribes, an African or Indian will expose his life freely at the bidding of his chief. This however is but a blind obedience, with only one motive, to follow where the chief leads, to go whither he sends. The will of the chief of clan or tribe is everything to the ignorant, though devoted, follower. Jonathan's armour-bearer had a higher feeling. His master would not have laid before him his own trust in God, unless he had known that the servant shared in it. The armour-bearer, as well as Jonathan, looked to the Lord for success, knowing that He could save by many or by few. They were but two, but the Lord, if such were His will, could save by two. Such was the faith of both.

When a small, and seemingly feeble, body of men—only two perhaps—undertake a great and difficult work, they are not really feeble, if all are animated by the same faith in God. So God would have it, with those whom He employs in His service. He would not let any who were fearful go with Gideon against the Midianites; he would save by few, not many; thus twenty and two thousand were sent back, and ten thousand only remained. But

even these were too many; the ten thousand were put to a further test, and only three hundred were suffered to go on (Judges vii): but these three hundred were all true men. Two or three met together in His name are enough to ensure the Lord's presence and blessing; and if any two disciples agree concerning anything they shall ask, a special promise is given that it shall be done for them. A very few are sufficient for a great work, if they have faith; for the power that will accomplish the work is not theirs but God's; and He can save by many or by few. The faith is the main point, not the number.

When a helper of any kind is not a mere underling or hireling, but a sharer in the faith of his superior, God, who assigns to each his place, and in whose eyes a faithful helper is of as great account as a faithful leader or master, will give His special blessing to their joint work. Jonathan was a godly man, as well as brave; and it may well be thought that he who looked to the Lord for success went not forth without prayer. His armour-bearer was like-minded. I think I see these two bending the knee, or bowing the head, together in prayer before they set out. "He that leadeth a godly life, he shall be my servant" (Ps. ci. 9). Jonathan, we may think, was of that mind, and had chosen this young man, not for his bravery alone, but for his godliness. The two were one in prayer and faith as well as in daring.

Happy is such a service, whether in peace or in

war! Happy the godly master who has a godly servant; and happy the servant too! And happy the godly officer who commands some godly soldiers, and happy the soldiers who are placed under such an officer. It does not weaken discipline, or lessen respect, that officer and soldier, when off duty, should meet as brethren in Christ, and kneel together in prayer. On the contrary, discipline is strengthened, and respect increased, by the bond of Christian fellowship.

Jonathan and his armour-bearer shared the danger, but the honour was chiefly Jonathan's. "Shall Jonathan die," said the people, "who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day" (1 Sam. xiv. 45). But they had not a word for the armour-bearer, though he had climbed, and fought, and slain at his side, and little could Jonathan have done without him. But the armour-bearer was well content. Let his master have the glory. Honour enough was it for him, to have been at his side throughout.

We have a greater Captain than Jonathan. Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. We are on no sort of equality with Him, as the armour-bearer was with Jonathan. Our Captain could do without us; nay, He has won the victory all alone. Yet we have our warfare, under His leadership, and in His strength; and we have not only to guard against the enemy but to go forth and storm his

strongholds. This is what we do in our missions to the heathen, and in all active work in our Captain's cause. From Him is all the power, from Him all the success: to Him be all the glory! Let us, who are but servants, soldiers, followers, armour-bearers, let us seek no honour for ourselves; let us refuse it, if any would give it to us; let us be glad that the people should make no mention of us, but give all the glory to our Captain; for He alone "hath wrought this great salvation," He hath not only "wrought with God," but He *is* God, and our salvation is of the Father and of the Son.

The armour-bearer carried Jonathan's weapons, or some of them; probably, when not actually engaged in battle, he carried his defensive armour too—his breastplate, and helmet, and shield. Our Captain does not employ us so; He bore even His *cross* Himself; yet one man was His armour-bearer that day, Simon was honoured by having the cross laid upon him. We do nothing to defend our Captain, He needs no defence of ours; it is He that defends us.

True, we are armour-bearers; but in another way. We carry armour for our own defence, and weapons for our own use. Our Captain Himself furnishes us with both armour and weapons—with a girdle for our loins, with a breastplate and a shield, with shoes for our feet, and a helmet and a sword—"the whole armour of God" (Eph. vi. 11-17). This armour we are not merely to carry, but to wear, and these weapons are to be held always ready for use, because

we are never safe from our enemy. The Philistines might sleep, and be off their guard; our enemy never sleeps.

We do not hear of the armour-bearer again, we do not even know his name. But what he did is written in the Book of God. And so (in another book) are the deeds of every faithful soldier of Christ. And not his deeds only, but his name. "Whose *names* are in the book of life" (Phil. iv. 3). "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels" (Rev. iii. 5).

Oh, whether master or servant, captain or soldier, leader or follower, honoured or unknown, oh to be acknowledged by our Lord as faithful, oh to have our names written *there*! We are in the fight *now*, under our Captain: let us, by His grace, endure hardness, and be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. v. ; 2 Tim. ii.).



DAVID AND THE MULBERRY-TREES.

DAVID was in himself a great light; but in some of the smaller events of his life he shines to us as one of the lesser lights of Scripture. The incident of the mulberry-trees is a case in point (2 Sam. v. 23-25).

Shortly before, he had gained a great victory over the Philistines, and destroyed their images. The victory was so complete that he gave to the place the name of *Baal-perazim*, the plain of breaches; for "The Lord," he said, "hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters" (v. 20). He had first "enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand?" (v. 19); and it was only when the Lord said, "Go up," that he went.

Victory did not make him vainglorious. He ascribed all to God; "The Lord hath broken forth upon mine enemies." And when the Philistines came again, then again he "enquired of the Lord,"

expecting probably the same answer as before. But this time it was different, "Thou shalt *not* go up." Well was it for David that he asked. Had he gone up, proud of his late victory and confident in his own strength, he would surely have been worsted. But he was wiser.

The first words of the answer were discouraging ; but only the first. There followed this direction, "but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry-trees." The grove was, we may suppose, in full view, or at least well known to David ; and probably it was the last quarter from which the enemy would expect an attack.

But this was not all. The *time* was appointed as well as the *place*. "And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself ; for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." He and his men were to lie concealed till the signal was given. It was a very simple signal—the rustling of the mulberry-leaves in the breeze—but it would come from God. Till he heard the sound in the tree-tops he was not to stir ; when he heard it, he was to be up and doing.

"And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him ; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer." Another great victory ! Greater perhaps than the first. And both were gained by obeying the voice of the Lord : the first

by going up at once, the last by not going up till the signal was given.

Some suppose that the leaves, stirred by the wind (no summer breeze, but a sudden gale) made a sound as of an army on the march, for it is called "the sound of a *going* in the tops of the mulberry-trees." But it may be that the word refers only to the usual movement of the leaves. David heard the sound, and took it as God's signal: if the Philistines heard it, they either mistook it for the sound of the tramp of men, or were filled by it with a vague terror. In either case, it was a fulfilment to the enemies of Israel of the threat pronounced against Israel, "and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them" (Lev. xxvi. 36).

When we have to take some important step, let us not do it without seeking counsel of God; and that, with the full purpose of obeying His direction whatever it may be. God's guidance will never mislead. At such a time, we should think ourselves happy if we could hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Go up," or "Go not up;" and in doubt and difficulty we do sometimes long for such precise orders as those which David received. We think that if God would give us some sign, such as the sound in the tree-tops, and tell us exactly what to do next, then we could wait quietly for the sign, and when it came, do just as God told us. To our mind, all would then be plain and easy; whereas now we are often troubled and anxious.

But God is unchanged. He still has His will with regard to us, and bids us follow it at every step. Can it be thought that He will not make His will known to us? He may take various ways of doing it, but He will surely guide us. There may be no mulberry-trees in our case, no sound of a going in the tops, but God can direct our minds without such tokens as these, and in His own way lead us to a right judgement. He can, however, if so He please, still act upon us by outward things, and He often does. Events and circumstances may be so ordered by His providence as to guide us, almost of necessity. One door may be closed, and another opened; what we expected may not happen, and what we had never thought of may come instead; a friend may come in, and give us just the advice we stood in need of; a book may give us a hint; above all, light may come to us from the Book of God. In the Old Testament we read, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. iii. 5, 6); "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8); in the New, "Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 6, 7). God will surely show us His will, in answer to our prayers; and in following

it we shall find safety and peace. His guidance does not depend on the rustling of leaves; once He guided so, but He can guide in other ways as well. It was only because *that* was His appointed sign that David went by it; if God had appointed some other sign, or had given no outward sign at all, yet David would both have received guidance and followed it.

Now that we have the whole Word of God, and the promise of the Spirit, we are not to look for outward signs as they of old did. Formerly the servants of God, though men of faith, yet walked much by sight; but now, under the Gospel, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. v. 7). Angels do not visit us, and few outward tokens are given to us; but we have as our constant guide the Word of God, and He has promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. God sometimes gives us outward signs; He always gives us these.

The wind still fulfils His will. The sound of it in the mulberry-trees instructed David; but we have a better teacher and guide, the Holy Spirit. He is likened to the wind. Like that, He is unseen and powerful. David heard the leaves rustle, but he did not see the wind that moved them; we feel the Spirit's power, but we see no one. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John iii. 8).

David waited near the mulberry-trees till he

heard the sound, but be sure he *listened* for it. Let us listen for the voice of the Spirit, and be attentive to His first motion in our hearts. Let us strain the ears of our understanding to catch His first promptings. Then we shall not be left in uncertainty, to grope our way without a guide.

But we are to *act* as well as wait. Such was the direction to David. He was to wait for the sign; when it was heard, he was to bestir himself. And so he did. God will guide us, but He calls us to act. He will show us what to do, and when; then, in His strength, we are to bestir ourselves. The next step (whatever it may be) is to be taken by *us*; we are to use our understanding, though not to lean on it; God works by means, and the means which He provides for us we are to use.

All was of the Lord—the order, the sign, the promise—and the Lord went before His servant; but David did his part. It is very simply told: “and David did so, as the Lord had commanded him.” And so he was able to smite the Philistines.

Let us give an unquestioning obedience to God's directions and commands. Let us seek to know His will, only that we may do it. Have you some enemy within, some hidden temptation, that troubles you sorely? That temptation forms your Philistine host. You are not like David to wait for a sign; you are to wait for nothing. The signal has been given long ago, the sound in the mulberry-trees has already been made, you have

received your orders to crucify the flesh and to resist the devil. In God's strength, "bestir thyself!" Put on your armour, the whole armour of God; "quit you like men, be strong!" "The Lord will go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." It is as easy for Him to give you the victory over your temptation, as it was to enable David to smite his foes. "Without Him you can do nothing, with Him you can do all." "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. xlv. 11).



THE TEMPLE BEFORE THE PALACE.

THOUGH the name of David occurs several times in it, yet the 132nd psalm was in all probability not written by him. The tenth verse seems to point either to Solomon as its author, or to some other of David's successors on the throne; for there the psalmist pleads with God for David's sake, and pleads as the Lord's anointed; in the following verse we find these words: "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." And that verse and the two preceding ones are almost exactly like the conclusion of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. vi. 41, 42).

In the opening the psalmist pleads with God David's afflictions, and longing desires: "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions: how he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the

tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes; or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." David's thoughts and feelings had come down to his son, or to his later descendant, for it is quite possible that this may be a psalm of the Restoration, written centuries after David's time; and they are here laid bare to us.

These therefore are David's thoughts and feelings, and even his very words, though recorded by another: he would not rest till he had found "a place for the Lord," a House for His worship and praise, a habitation, where His presence and blessing might especially be sought. He would make no delay. He would give himself no rest, he would not go back to his house from that place in which he made the vow, he would not (for so we may probably understand his words) he would not build a dwelling for himself until he had found a habitation for the Lord; the temple should come before the palace.

I know of a like case in modern times. An English gentleman bought an estate in a lovely spot abroad, on which to build a house; but, before beginning his house, he built within his grounds a beautiful little church for the use of himself and his household and neighbours, and of the English-speaking visitors who came to the places near. Long before his own house was inhabited, and while yet he and his family were

living in temporary quarters, the worship of God was set up, and the little church was regularly filled with worshippers. This was in the very spirit of David.

This, however, is not common. Usually our own wellbeing is cared for first; and it is not till our comforts and luxuries have been provided for, that (if even then) some part of the overplus is spent on the work of God. The church may be out of repair, or too small; there may be need of more strength in the ministry; appeals may come from this quarter and from that in our own country; and the heathen may be crying, "Come over, and help us!" but generally such things as these do but get the leavings, if they get *them*.

There is a noble fervour in David, that puts to shame the selfish coldness of most men. Not only should the building of the House of God come first, but it should come by far the first. He would not wait till he had time to set about it, he would *make* the time; everything else should give place to this; he would not sleep till he had found a place, and put his plan in motion. In a common man, some would call this enthusiastic and extravagant; they will hardly apply those words to the "man after God's own heart." But in any case such extravagance and enthusiasm are better far than a cold and calculating prudence.

David's zeal was for building the House of God, an actual habitation; but any great work for God, anything that is for His honour and glory, and the

spreading of the knowledge of Him, should hold the same place in our desires—the *first* place. What are our comforts, compared with His service? What our ease and luxury, in comparison with the spread of our Redeemer's kingdom? What are amusements and entertainments, and the gratification of our tastes, and our rising in the world, compared with the reclaiming of the depraved, the saving of those on the way to ruin, the rescuing of the drunkard, the searching for the lost sheep of Christ, the conversion of the heathen? These are such great works, the others so small! These are for God, those for self. These are for eternity, those for time. These are for nothing less than the building up of a spiritual temple, and the setting up of God's worship in human hearts. Shall a grand house for oneself be put before these? Shall a *Christian* lay out great sums on dresses and jewels, on new carriages and furniture, while the work of God is neglected, or finds but the second place—and that far in the rear? Well may the word of the Lord by Haggai be laid to heart now, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. i. 4).

But David's desire, though so ardent, was not granted. He built his palace, but he never built a temple. Was not his desire then a *right* one? Certainly it was; and he was right in putting it first. But he had shed much blood. Not from any fault of his, for he was no murderer; but he

had led a troubled life, and had been "a man of war from his youth"; and it was not for him to build a House for God; his son Solomon should do it, he whose name means "peaceful." The temple was built; but not by David. He provided a great store of materials, and so proved that his desire was sincere; but the work itself he must leave to Solomon.

Yet his desire was *accepted*. "Thou didst well, that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings viii. 18). It rested with God, who should be the actual builder; but in will and purpose David built the temple; and his earnest desire, and his dying charge to Solomon, and the great provision he made—the iron and brass, the wrought stones and the cedar-trees—were accepted by God as a true service.

The desire to serve God is never overlooked by Him; and one who truly wishes to give himself to His work, and to put ease and comfort and worldly good in the second place, is graciously regarded as actually doing so. But it does not in every case please God that the wish should be gratified exactly as formed in the mind. Another may be called to do the work instead; and he whose will it was to do it may have to take some other part, to prepare the way, to give direction and advice, or even to act as helper instead of leader. Yet the desire is accepted.

There is many a true missionary who never sets foot in a heathen land; and not a few, who would gladly join with those who personally work for God

in the slums of our great cities, are set to do a quieter work in their own homes. Family ties, home duties, and the wants and wishes of parents, keep some at home; ill health, delicacy of constitution, and the being unfit to "rough it," form the hindrance to others. But the will is accepted. A devoted heart is what God calls for; and never is it unnoticed or unblest.

It was a grand day, when, after seven years of labour, Solomon assembled the people, and brought up the Ark of the Lord, and solemnly dedicated the Temple; but that stately ceremony, and all that Solomon said and did that day, were not more acceptable in the sight of God than David's simple wish and purpose. True, the glory of the Lord filled the House, "so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud," but not even this solemn token of God's presence expressed His favour and acceptance more clearly than the simple words addressed to David, "Thou didst well, that it was in thine heart."

You, in whose heart it was, and still is, to go forth and take part in those great works for God which you see or hear of, do not repine, if the way is closed against you, or envy those who are so employed, as if *they* were working for God, and *you* doing nothing. Shall not the Lord of all employ His servants as He will? If you do in truth put the Temple before the Palace—God's service before your own comfort—shall not God's *will* also come before your own? If it be His will

to confine you to your room, or lay you on a sick-bed, or keep you weak and delicate, or put you in charge of younger brothers and sisters, or set you to tend an aged father or mother, then *that* is (so to speak) the *temple* which you are to build for Him. Do it with all your heart, make it your first object, think little of ease and comfort in comparison with this, be not slothful in your work because it has little of change or excitement; be content with a *quiet* work.

In your case the "place for the Lord" is already found, and the "habitation" in which He will dwell. The place is that very sphere in which He has set you; and there it is that He will make His habitation. Set the Lord always before you. Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God. Mark His guidance; be content with His will, and with your own lot and work; and seek that your own heart may be His temple. Put His service first; but be sure you leave it to Him to appoint how and where you are to serve Him. Then He will, for Christ's sake, look upon you with favour and acceptance; and you may take to yourself these gracious words, "Thou didst well, that it was in thine heart."



THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

A HANDFUL of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse"—scarcely enough to make one little cake ; this seems the merest trifle, not worthy to be mentioned in a book, hardly worth a thought. Yet it is mentioned, and mentioned in the Book of God, and the story of it has come down to us through nearly three thousand years.

Trifling as the thing may seem, it was not really trifling ; for it gave occasion for a special putting forth of divine power. The morsel of meal, and the few drops of oil, were taken in hand by God, and by them He wrought a great wonder. We find the story in 1 Kings xvii.

In a time of famine, Elijah was miraculously fed at the brook Cherith. But after a time the brook dried up ; then he was told to go elsewhere. He was commanded to go to *Zarephath* ; there he would find a fresh provision made for him.

Unknown to Elijah (though he was a prophet) God had already given His orders. But to whom ? To a poor widow-woman there. Elijah did not

know, and she did not know yet ; but the command had gone forth, and those whom it concerned would know in due time.

Yet how unlikely a person to be appointed to feed the prophet ! She herself was in extreme want. As he drew near to the gate of the city he saw her, and doubtless was informed by an inward voice that this was the widow-woman who was to feed him. But did Elijah know what she was doing—gathering fuel to dress the last meal for herself and her son ? If so, it showed strong faith that he should ask her for food for himself. How was she to feed *him*, who had but a handful for herself ? If he did not know it before she spoke, he soon did know it from her own lips. The meal-tub was all but empty, there were but a few drops of oil left in the cruse ; one more meal for her and her son, and then they must die. This was her pitiful tale.

Not so. "Thus saith the Lord" prevailed over all in the mind of Elijah ; and soon it was shown to prevail in very deed. For all she said, Elijah persevered : "Fear not ; go, and do as thou hast said : but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me ; and after make for thee and for thy son." And then followed the promise : "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Now the woman believed also. "And she went, and did according to the saying of Elijah." She

took the handful of meal and the drop of oil that were to have fed her and her son, and drest them for the prophet; but when that last handful was gone the barrel was not empty, and when the oil had been used there was still some left. And so it went on: "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by Elijah." "And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days"—a full year, according to the marginal reading.

"According to the word of the Lord." In that lies the secret of this miracle, and of all miracles. It is the power of the Lord that works miracles, the word of the Lord that promises and declares them. It was so when the Lord twice fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes. It is so with us in that constant exercise of almighty power by which we are fed every day. Why do not our barrel and cruse fail, but because the Lord keeps them full? But for Him, they *would* fail; but He teaches us to ask every day that they may not fail ("Give us this day our daily bread"), and they fail not. Nay, so gracious is He that He keeps from failing the barrel and cruse of many an one who never asks Him, never thanks Him, never thinks of Him as the Giver of all. This provision lasted "many days"—a whole year perhaps; but for how many days and years have *our* meal and oil come to us? All our life long; and always from the same hand, and by the same word.

But so it had been in fact with both the prophet

and the widow all their lives. Before Elijah was thus fed at Zarephath, he had been fed at Cherith; before he was fed at Cherith, he had been fed wherever he was: and before ever the famine came, and she found her wants supplied by a miracle, the widow's wants had always been supplied, and by the same power and word. Oh, let none forget this! Let us give thanks at every meal, as for a fresh supply; and let our thanks be *real* thanks.

Yet, as to the widow of Zarephath, so to many besides, there come times of *special* need. Many have known such times, with regard even to the necessities of life; and not the so-called poor only, but some of almost all classes. A landlord has been brought into straits by his rents being lowered, or not paid; a farmer by low prices, or the failure of crops; a tradesman by "bad times," or bad debts; a stock-holder by the failure of dividends; the breaking of a bank has brought ruin to numbers; a strike has caused want in many a home; slackness of work, illness and other things have driven many a mechanic hard, and many a farm-labourer too. Many such cases come to light; more are unknown. But numbers have at times been brought so low as not to know whence the next day's supply was to come. There was but a handful of meal in the barrel, and a few drops of oil left in the cruse.

Have you ever known such a time, and are you now brought out of it? Who delivered you? Who sent you the next day's food, and the next, and so on till the present time? The same gracious God

as made the widow's meal not to fail. He put forth His hand for you, as He did for her. He wrought no miracle, it is true; He made use of ordinary means; but the supply and the relief came from Him. Look back on that time. Recall your distress, your almost despair. And now it is *past*, and you are in comfort. Give thanks to God for His goodness. Perhaps He was not even sought: yet He came to your help.

But it may be that you are in straits *now*; at this very time want presses on you, or threatens to. You read this story, and you ask "May I take this promise to myself? Will my meal and oil (the little I have left) not fail?"

You have every reason to believe that it will be with you even as it was with this woman; you have many invitations to call upon God in your need, many promises that He will hear you. There will be no visible miracle, and no special messenger. In your despondency, when doing your best (though with a heavy heart) to eke out what is left, you will see no prophet appear; but, without a prophet, you have God's messages already in His Word. Take it in hand, and see what He says. He puts this prayer into your lips, "Give us this day our daily bread"; He says, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure" (Isa. xxxiii. 16); "The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the Lord thy God" (Isa. li. 14); "When the poor

and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Isa. xli. 17). If you will believe, God's promise to you is as clear and sure as to this woman. Your barrel and cruse shall not fail.

But there are many wants beside that of bread. Often we are in want of comfort, guidance, wisdom; often things seem against us, and we see no way out of difficulty; and always we are in need of grace and strength. Of whatever kind our need may be, we may take to ourselves the promises of God. He is almighty, and one kind of need is as easy for Him to supply as another. Meal and oil form a simple need, yet in this case a miracle must be wrought to supply it; other needs may be more complicated, but all is simple to infinite wisdom and power.

Those small resources that are left you, seeming almost none; the mere possibility of relief; the faint ray of hope; they are your handful of meal and drop of oil. God can cause them to last, and increase and multiply them, and make them to be enough. It was so easy for the widow to believe, when she and her house had eaten many days; but not so easy on the day the assurance was given. It is always easy to believe when the promise has been fulfilled. But believe it before it is fulfilled, believe it now. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29).

Was this *all* the blessing that came to the widow

of Zarephath through Elijah? Oh, no. There were at least three besides.

First, she had the honour of supporting God's servant. The ravens were appointed to do so before; it might have pleased God to employ them still, at Zarephath as well as at Cherith, or to make use of other creatures; but it did please Him to employ this widow, and not merely to put her to this work, but also to give her a heart for it. When God relieves us, and gives us plenty, and sends us comfort, let us not spend all on ourselves. Let us think it an honour to use His gifts in His service, as He in His providence seems to point out. If not called to feed a prophet, there is something else we are to do.

Secondly, the widow's son was brought to life. If Elijah had not been there, the story would have had a sad end—the death of the widow's boy. When God sends us a blessing, and we receive it, and believe and obey, and use it according to His will, what a train of blessings may follow! Personal blessings and family blessings, temporal blessings and spiritual—he who believes and obeys may expect them all. God does not bless once and then leave off blessing.

Thirdly, the woman, who up to this time believed with but an imperfect faith, at length believed fully: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

Thus one blessing leads to another. Thus a

temporal good, rightly received, may become the means of spiritual good. Contrast this woman's state when first we saw her with her state now. We saw her a poor sad woman gathering sticks for her last meal, and knowing but little of the true God, for Zarephath was outside the land of Israel ; we part from her as a believer, knowing and trusting in the Lord ; her barrel and cruse have never failed, her son is alive from the dead, and ~~she~~ she has been for a whole year, and doubtless will be to the end of her days, employed in God's service, and taking part in His work in the world.

And all of God's grace ! " Many widows were in *Israel* ; but unto none of *them* was Elias sent, but unto Sarepta, a city of *Sidon*, unto a woman that was a widow " (Luke iv. 26). She was not outside the grace and favour of God ; nor are any of *us*.



THE SEVEN THOUSAND LEFT IN ISRAEL.

WE read of them in the first book of Kings (xix. 18): "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." This is what we read of them ; and we know nothing more. We do not know their names, nor to what tribe or tribes they belonged ; of all the seven thousand we know not one single name ; we do not even know whether their number was actually seven thousand, or whether (as often) the number seven stands for any large number—more or less than seven.

But did not *Elijah* know them ? He was the great teacher of his day ; was he not acquainted with his scholars ? He was the one prophet of the Lord left ; did he not know the Lord's people ? He said, " I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life, to take it away " (xix. 10) : did he really think he was the only one ? did he think that when he was

gone, there would not be one servant of the Lord left ?

This can hardly be. For he knew that at least there was *Obadiah*, and, though he might put little faith in the cry of the people, impressed by the miracle of the fire from heaven, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God!" (1 Kings xviii. 39), yet it cannot be thought that Obadiah was the only faithful man he knew of in Israel. He spoke in deep despondency. He was alone, he had fled for his life, he was in great danger of the vengeance of Jezebel. It seemed to him at the moment that he was forsaken by all. In this feeling he said, "I, even I only, am left."

So apt are we, in our times of despondency, to magnify our troubles, and to shut our eyes to the grounds of hope and comfort that remain! Our Lord and Saviour, when he really was left alone, said, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John xvi. 32). Elijah could not rise to that. If he did still believe that God was with him, the thought brought him no comfort.

But perhaps, in a measure, these seven thousand *were* unknown to Elijah. It was a time of fear. Jezebel was determined to put down the worship of Jehovah, and to exterminate those who followed it; and Ahab was but little behind her. Numbers of the prophets or teachers had been slain, the rest were forced into hiding; Elijah himself was sought for everywhere. Doubtless the worshippers of the

Lord, as well as their teachers, went into hiding. It was a time when brother could not trust brother. The faithful did not keep together, but were dispersed throughout the land. They dared not meet; in great measure they were unknown to each other; even Elijah, their great prophet and leader, if he knew some, did not know all.

Besides, there were perhaps *secret* believers; some who had never ranged themselves on the Lord's side, and yet were His in heart. It is so now, in some heathen and Mahometan countries, in India, for instance; and this forms one main ground of hope in missionary work—the number of hidden believers. If there were such then, it is not likely that Elijah knew them all. His words may have led them to God, and yet he may not have known it. They were hidden “in dens and caves of the earth.” If ever they met, it was as the persecuted must always meet; as the Covenanters met in Scotland, the Huguenots in France, the converts of Madagascar during the long persecution there.

Elijah did not know them, but God knew them, every one. It was of Him that they had remained steadfast; His grace had kept them. “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel.” This means more than, “Yet there remain to me seven thousand.” God Himself had left, or reserved them. He always does reserve some. In the worst days, He keeps some for Himself. St. Paul quotes to the Romans this very “answer of God” to Elijah, and adds, “Even so then at this present

time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. xi. 5). The Jews, as a nation, rejected Christ; but there was a remnant that believed. Seven thousand (though more than Elijah knew of) were but a few, compared with the many thousands of Israel; and the believing Jews were but a remnant; but they did exist, and that because God had reserved them.

He always does so. In the worst times, He has some who cleave to Him; in the vilest places, He has those who love Him. How is this? When there is all to make it unlikely, and seemingly impossible—time, place, and circumstances—how does this come to pass? "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel" gives us the clue. God is supreme over time and place and circumstances, and He has reserved them to Himself. There is "a remnant, according to the election of grace."

God knew each one of those seven thousand, and He knows every person now, who is one of a few that love and serve Him, one of "a remnant," in some cases the *only* remnant near. Numbers are against you, and human power is against you; neighbours are against you, former friends perhaps stand aloof from you, and those who are of one mind with you do not know you: but God is for you, and with you. You are precious in His sight. Jesus said, "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God" (John xvi. 27). And *you* believe, and therefore you come within the number.

Though you may be almost or quite alone, yet you are not alone, because He is with you.

Madagascar furnishes a striking instance of hidden worshippers. For twenty-five years persecution raged in that island, from 1835 till 1860. During a great part of that time it was death to worship God, or even to possess a Bible. Yet, though they could not exercise their religion openly, most of the converts remained steadfast, there were many hidden believers, God had left Him "seven thousand" in Madagascar. Bibles were concealed in the most secret places, or were buried underground; and the Christians, if they could not meet for worship in the congregation, yet prayed in secret, and, where possible, in the family. And this, in the face of such suffering as is described by one of them as follows:

"We then entered a thicket or wood of small bamboos, where in many places there was water up to the knees, and there were many crocodiles in the water. We were nine days in that wood, and had nothing to eat but clay and water. It was all water, or marshy ground, and we found no place to lie down and sleep on, except we came to a tree, or a piece of ground somewhat raised and dry . . . We did not expect to live, or even to see man again; we thought we should die in that swamp."

Another wrote thus to the wife of a missionary: "Beloved mother, when I lay hold on this paper and ink and pen to write to you, my heart and all within me is moved. I have much to say to you.

I wish to tell you of the sorrows that have befallen us. Very great was the persecution which drove us into the wilderness. They sought to put me to death They sent officers to take me up, and they took all the people they found in my house, and my wife Rabodo also. My children, servants, and everything I had in my house, they took away as a forfeit to the queen. They bound my wife Rabodo, and flogged her from morning until night, to make her tell who were her companions. She fainted, and they left her to recover a little, and then flogged her again. But she refused to give up the names of any; so that they were astonished, and said, 'She is a Christian indeed!' Failing to get her to tell who were her associates, they put a heavy iron ring round her neck, and round each ankle. They also fastened these rings together by heavy iron chains from the neck to the ankles, and then bound her to four more Christians. Five others were also bound together, and there was a third party of sixteen also bound together. Every Sabbath-day for seven months they placed these three parties before the people, that they might see how they were punished for keeping holy the Lord's day. At the end of the seven months they separated them, and sent five to the East: of these, two died, and three still remain. The other party of five they sent to the North; of these, four died, and one only remains: and the sixteen they sent to the West: of these, five died, and eleven remain. My wife Rabodo was among

those they sent to the West. She was left in bonds, and died in March 1859. Yes, she died in her chains; her works follow her. They pursued me for four years and three months, seeking to put me to death. . . . My children they have sold into slavery, and my property they have taken; so that I have now no house to dwell in, or land to live upon. What has befallen me is too hard for nature; but precious are the riches in Christ, and in Him light are the sorrows of earth¹."

This was written in 1861, after the persecution had ceased. Then those who survived came forth, and it was found that, not only had the light of truth not been quenched, but the number of converts had increased. Though not a few had died for Christ, yet the number of believers had grown during the twenty-five years of persecution at a more rapid rate than is usual in missions in a time of peace. In 1836, when the missionaries were forced to flee, very few converts were known to exist; in 1861, when the persecution was over, seven thousand came out from their hiding-places—the very same number as God declared that He had left Him in Israel. Truly, "the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isa. lix. 1).

The same Lord, who preserved the seven thousand in Israel, and the seven thousand in Madagascar, can and will keep and save all who are faithful to Him, and trust in Him. If ever

¹ *The Gospel in Madagascar*, pp. 221-224.

you think you are left alone, lay these cases to heart.

But do not ever think yourself alone. Not a single man of those seven thousand left in Israel was with Elijah; yet they existed. You too may be quite alone; yet you have many thousands of fellow-believers. There is such a thing as "the Communion of Saints." Believe in it, and seek, through the Spirit, oneness with those who believe, though unknown. It will strengthen you, to think of them as members with you of one body. Do not think yourself alone in trial. Your trials many of them are suffering too; and your very loneliness others also may be feeling. But above all, they are one with you in *this*; that you and they have the same God and Father, the same Saviour, the same Holy Spirit; that you drink from the same fountain of truth—the Word of God, and daily meet at the same throne of grace. God has left Him seven thousand in Israel. Be of good cheer! He is your God and theirs; He will still preserve and keep both them and you.

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JEHOASH, KING OF ISRAEL.

OF all the kings of Israel after the division of the kingdom, there was not one good ; of each in succession it is written that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord." This is written of Jehoash (or Joash) as well as of the rest.

Joash was the son of Jehoahaz, and grandson to Jehu. Notwithstanding his evil-doing, he was secure in his kingdom, because God had promised Jehu that his children of the fourth generation should sit on the throne of Israel. Joash was the second ; after him came Jeroboam (the second of the name) and Zachariah ; and then the line of Jehu came to an end. "This was the word of the Lord which He spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass" (2 Kings xv. 12).

Joash, like the rest of the kings of Israel, "did evil in the sight of the Lord," walking in the idolatrous ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat ; but it is not said of him, as it is of Jeroboam, that

he "made Israel to sin." It seems, indeed, that he did not go to such lengths in sin as some of the other kings; like his father Jehoahaz (see xiii. 4), he had some small remnant of faith in God, and some reverence for his prophet. But this was swallowed up in his general disobedience; so far was he from following the Lord fully, that his life is summed up in those few words, "he did evil in the sight of the Lord."

"In the sight of the Lord," that is, according to the judgement of the Lord. It is not unlikely that in the sight of men, of his own subjects especially, the sixteen years' reign of Joash, as compared with other reigns, appeared good. For he was a man of some courage and force of character, and did some considerable acts. "The rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah" (xiii. 12); these words point to things done by him, beside those recorded. And though it was of the Lord that he was able to take from the king of Syria the cities which Jehoahaz his father had lost, yet the Lord works by instruments, and Joash was an able and valiant instrument. So the history seems to show: "And Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel" (xiii. 25).

But why three times only? Why were not all

the cities recovered? This question brings us to one of the chief events in the life of Joash, his visit to the dying bed of Elisha (xiii. 14-19).

"Now Elisha," we read, "was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof"—the very words spoken by Elisha himself to Elijah, when he saw him carried up into heaven" (2 Kings ii. 12). Had Joash heard that story? Or did he speak from himself only?

At all events, the words show some faith, though a weak and inconsistent faith. He did not come hypocritically. His sorrow was genuine, if not deep; his tears were true tears. Those who will not be guided by the good, yet often esteem them. Joash esteemed Elisha. Though he followed his father in departing from God, he nevertheless revered God's servant, and grieved that he should be taken away. However inconsistent with his life, his feeling probably was that a light was about to be put out in Israel. And when he saw the prophet on his deathbed, this feeling was deepened. "O my father," he cried, "my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." At that moment perhaps he felt that idols were nothing; Elisha, the servant of God, was as a father to him, venerable in years and character, his true guide, his spiritual father. While Elisha lived, he and his people had in him a safeguard; for the

prophet's sake, God's protection would not be withdrawn ; thus he was as chariot and horsemen to Israel, a host of defence.

Joash was at the moment sincere. But a moment's feeling does not change the character. He mourned for the coming loss of a protector, but he had no thought of altering his life. He was not a hypocrite, but he was half-hearted ; shallow in feeling, and weak in principle and purpose. Such as he was before his visit to Elisha, such (there is every reason to believe) he was after it.

Many there are, who have at times a serious impression, a passing thought of good, and even a transient purpose to amend. But, if this be all, their "goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hos. vi. 4). Let none trust in the feeling of a moment, or in the thoughts produced by some impressive scene. Something more is wanted—the work of the Spirit of God in the heart. Seek this. Seek it humbly and earnestly, for Christ's sake. Then it will not be sought in vain. And then a real and lasting change will come.

At the time of the king's visit to Elisha, the kingdom was in distress from the oppression of the Syrians. In the reign of Jehoahaz the oppression had been very sore ; of all his army the king had only fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen remaining, "for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing" (2 Kings xiii. 7). It seems to

have been at that time that the Lord, in answer to the prayer of Jehoahaz, "gave Israel a *saviour*, so that," as we read, "they went out from under the hand of the Syrians : and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime" (xiii. 5). When they again fell away from God, the Syrians were once more allowed to oppress them ; and under that oppression they were at the time when Elisha was dying.

But who was this *saviour* ? Many think it was Joash himself ; who, in his father's lifetime, was used by God as His instrument of deliverance, and had for a time brought the people from under the Syrian yoke. If this be so, his character as a brave leader is established.

He is an older man now. Something of his youthful heat and courage is abated, and oppression has broken his spirit. Or, if he is still strong in arms, he is not strong in faith.

He has a great opportunity. As he stands weeping at the prophet's bedside, he is told by him to "take bow and arrows," and he does so. The history goes on thus : "And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it : and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he (Elisha) said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria : for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed

them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (xiii. 15-19).

And so it came to pass. The word of Elisha came exactly true. "Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. *Three times* did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel" (xiii. 25). But not all of them. Had his faith been stronger, he might have recovered all; but he only half believed, and according to his faith it was done to him.

If Joash was the "saviour" mentioned before, it is not *this* deliverance that is there alluded to, but a previous and more complete one. That deliverance was given in answer to the prayer of Jehoahaz and in his lifetime; and *then* "they went out from under the hand of the Syrians," whereas *now* they were only partly delivered.

Thus Joash missed his opportunity. His faith was but a half-faith, uncertain and feeble; and, while even such a faith was recognized, yet it was but a half-blessing that he received. We read, "Open thy mouth *wide*, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxxi. 10): our Saviour said to the woman, "Thy

faith hath saved thee : go in peace" (Luke vii. 50) ; a full faith was followed by a complete forgiveness and deliverance.

Did a sense of transgression weigh upon the mind of Joash, and hinder his belief? Did the thought of his departure from God prevent him from now coming to Him with all his heart and trusting fully in His power and grace? It well might: yet the presence of the dying prophet, and the words that came from him so plainly as the voice of God, should have overcome doubt and fear.

We have a worse enemy than the Syrians—the plague of our own hearts ; but we have at hand a mightier one than Elisha to help and deliver us, the Son of God, our Saviour and Intercessor. We are quite unworthy, we have gone astray, we have gone back ; yet, through Him, we may approach God and lay our distress before Him, and make our humble petition, and cast ourselves upon His mercy. We have a great opportunity. Let us use it. We want much ; let us ask for much. God's promises are great and full ; let us meet them with a full faith. If we will seek and believe, God will bless us more than *thrice*. All that we need, He will give ; as often as we go to Him in faith, He will bless us. Let us not strike thrice only, and then *stay* !



HILKIAH AND SHAPHAN.

THE FINDING OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

BING Josiah, that great reformer and reviver of religion, when he reached his twenty-fifth year, sent Shaphan the scribe to the House of the Lord, with orders to Hilkiah, the high priest, to take the sum of all the silver which the door-keepers had received of the people, and see to its being laid out on the repair of the House (2 Kings xxii).

In executing this order of the king, Hilkiah made a great discovery; he found in the House the Book of the Law. The book, it appears, had been lost sight of, and forgotten. During the evil reigns of Amon and Manasseh, the father and grandfather of Josiah, which lasted together no less than fifty-seven years, and perhaps for long before, the Sacred Book had been neglected, and gone out of knowledge.

It was as if, with us, the Bible had long been lost sight of. Happily this is impossible. With the Bible in almost every house in the land, we cannot lose it; no neglect, however general, can make it to be a forgotten book. But with the Jews the case was different. The Book of the Law was not spread throughout the land. Even the synagogues of our Lord's time did not yet exist. The Book was laid up in the House of the Lord, and in the course of generations it had been forgotten. It was a lost book, till Hilkiash found it.

Hilkiash was high priest, but he was not perhaps so learned a man as Shaphan the scribe, whose business it was to teach and explain the law. Hilkiash understood enough to see the importance of his discovery; he knew the book to be the Book of the Law; but he brought the book to Shaphan, as the more learned, and Shaphan read it.

If Hilkiash saw the importance of his discovery, Shaphan, it appears, had a yet deeper sense of it. Hilkiash gave the book to Shaphan; and Shaphan at once brought it to the king. "Hilkiash the priest," said he, "hath delivered me a book." And Shaphan "read it before the king." The book deeply affected King Josiah. Strange to say, he seems till now to have had no knowledge of it whatever. But now, when he heard its solemn denunciations, he rent his clothes, and at once sent Hilkiash and Shaphan and three others to inquire of the Lord

further. The very things against which the Book gave warning, his fathers had done; "great is the wrath of the Lord," said he, "that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according to all that which is written concerning us."

There was a prophetess then in Jerusalem named Huldah; to her Hilkiah and Shaphan and the rest went. She sent back word to Josiah (speaking in the name of the Lord) that evil would come on the people for their idolatry, but that the king himself should find mercy and have a peaceful end.

Then followed a great reformation. Josiah, impressed by the words of the book, filled with a holy awe of God, and grateful for the mercy promised to him, gathered together the elders of Judah from every part of the country, and read in the ears of the people the words of the book, and made a solemn covenant before the Lord, for himself and the people, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His statutes. And next, the idolatrous priests were put down, and the groves destroyed, and the altars and high places and images utterly done away with, and the Passover, disused for generations, was restored. "Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." It was a great reformation.

But it was the work of the *king* himself. True;

yet his servants had a great part in it. Hilkiāh gave the book to Shaphan, Shaphan brought it and read it to the king. The first steps in the reformation were taken by *them*; and to these two was owing all that followed. For, suppose for a moment that they had acted differently. Hilkiāh, finding the book, might have paid no attention to it, treated it as a mere relic of old times, and covered it out of sight again; or, if he opened it, he might, like King Zedekiah with Jeremiah's roll not many years after, have even destroyed the book, angry with its threatenings, and thinking thus to hinder their coming to pass. And Shaphan the scribe, when the book was brought to him, instead of taking it to the king, might have kept it secret from him, in fear of his displeasure. Zedekiah was angry with Baruch; why should not Josiah be angry with Shaphan?

But Hilkiāh and Shaphan, like Baruch afterwards¹, were true servants of God. They did their part faithfully. But for them, Josiah might never have heard of the book, and that great reformation might not have taken place. These two were God's instruments in a great revival of religion.

God works by instruments, and those various. In any great work, if there be one chief actor, there are lesser ones too; each with his own part to take. Even Paul, the "chosen vessel," had his helpers—

¹ See *Lesser Lights*, first series, p. 158.

Ananias, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Gaius his host, Aquila and Priscilla his friends—and many others. Here, Josiah was chief in the work, but Hilkiah and Shaphan had their part in it.

Let us be among God's workers, both in regard to His Word, and in other things too. Let us bring to light His Word before others ; let us seek to spread the knowledge of it ; let us bring it forth daily in our homes, and let us send it abroad far and wide. Our Lord and Master said to His Father in heaven, "I have given them Thy Word" : let us follow in His steps.

And let each servant be content with that part in this work, and in every other work for God, which is set before him. All are not wanted as leaders, all are not qualified to lead ; most of us are to be followers and helpers : let us be well content with the place of even a humble helper, "a *door-keeper* in the House of the Lord." If it please God so, let others carry on the work which we began ; let others be in authority, and we in the place of servants. Let us be quite willing to retire into obscurity, when we have done our appointed work. Hilkiah and Shaphan stepped forth, and did what they were appointed to do, and lived their life, and filled their place, and then passed off the scene. True, their names remain ; but they themselves soon gave place to others.

We too are passing on, we of this present generation, and soon our place will be filled by others. Let us work while it is day ; let us serve our

generation ; let us do our Lord's work just where He has placed us. Will even Josiah the king stand higher than Hilkiash the priest, or Shaphan the scribe? God, who places all according to His sovereign will, looks, not at the highness of the place, but at the faithfulness of the servant.



JEHOIACHIN.

JEHOIACHIN (or Jeconiah, or Coniah, for he is called by all three names) was the son of Jehoiakim, and therefore the grandson of good king Josiah. But he followed his father, not his grandfather; "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done" (2 Kings xxiv. 6-9).

But he had little time, while he reigned alone, for doing either good or evil, for after his father's death his reign lasted only three months. He is said to have been eighteen years old when he began to reign; but in the Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxvi. 9) he is said to have been but eight. It appears that for ten years he reigned jointly with his father. It is not likely that he had any great influence then. So that, when he is said to have done evil like his father, we may understand that while his father lived nothing was done by the son against the father's idolatrous practices, and that during the short time he reigned alone they were still con-

tinued. "That which was evil in the sight of the Lord," here as elsewhere, refers mainly to idolatry ; not so much to personal character as to the public sanction of that idolatry which was an abomination in the sight of God.

Jehoiachin does not seem to have been an active and zealous promoter of idolatry, like Jeroboam "who made Israel to sin," or Manasseh, of whom it is written that he "seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel" (2 Kings xxi. 9). He had little strength of character, even for evil. As he found things, so he let them go on. It is possible that, had he immediately succeeded Josiah, he would have continued in Josiah's ways ; but two idolatrous reigns had intervened, that of his uncle Jehoahaz and that of his father Jehoiakim, and in their steps he trod.

The prophet Jeremiah, prophesying probably during the three months of his reign, speaks of him almost with contempt. The very shortening of his name from Jeconiah to Coniah seems to show this. "Is this man *Coniah* a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure?" (Jer. xxii. 28). An idol is "nothing in the world"; but a *broken* idol (such as Dagon, 1 Sam. v. 4) is contemptible indeed! Jehoiachin himself was like a despised broken idol, and the title agreed with his sin. The idols for which he had turned away from Jehovah could do nothing for him in his need, and he himself was as powerless as they.

He reigned but three months, and then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came and besieged Jerusalem. Jehoiakim had rebelled against him, and this was the punishment of his rebellion. Jehoiachin now made no resistance, but went out to him and surrendered, with his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers. Was this from fear, or was it by the advice of Jeremiah? For Jeremiah's advice (speaking in the name of the Lord) was to yield, and go captive to Babylon. Those who obeyed (so the people were told afterwards, and probably at this time also) would fare well in the land of their captivity, and might hope to be restored to their own land, whereas those who remained would be scattered and perish. Let us hope that it was in obedience to God that Jehoiachin surrendered. Though he "did evil in the sight of the Lord," he is not spoken of as sinning in the same degree as either his father Jehoiakim or his uncle Zedekiah, who succeeded him. Jehoiakim "did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done"—even the worst of them, including Manasseh (2 Kings xxiii. 37); and of Zedekiah it is said "he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 12, 13). This seems to be put in

contrast with the conduct of Jehoiachin in his surrender: Zedekiah hardened his heart, and went on to his ruin; Jehoiachin obeyed the prophet's word, and yielded.

His mother, we read, was carried away with him; as well as his wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land; and, besides these, "all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon" (2 Kings xxiv. 16).

It was but a miserable remnant that was left. Though Mattaniah (his father's brother) was set up as king by Nebuchadnezzar (his name being changed to Zedekiah) yet the kingdom under him did but drag on a miserable existence for eleven years more, and then all came to ruin, and the great captivity began. As an independent kingdom, the kingdom of Judah may be said to have come to an end with Jehoiachin.

His mother is mentioned, and his wives, but not his children. Had he none? Not at that time, it appears. Jeremiah had prophesied thus: "O earth, earth, earth [which we may understand as O land, land, land] hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man *childless*, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. xxii. 29, 30). He had children afterwards, no less than seven in number, born in the land of his captivity

(1 Chron. iii. 17, 18), and another, Salathiel, called his son, appears in the genealogy of our Lord (Matt. i. 12) where he is mentioned as having been born "after they were brought to Babylon"; but none of his sons ever came to the throne.

His mother's name is given, "Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem." May we think that she had any influence for good with her son? She was no heathen woman, but a daughter of Jerusalem; and, though to be of Jerusalem in those evil times, was no sure sign of goodness, yet this woman must have known the will of God as declared by Jeremiah, and it may have been in a measure by her persuasion that Jehoiachin obeyed and yielded. He was but a youth of eighteen; at that age a mother's voice is still listened to. It is pleasant, at all events, to imagine that in the family-council held before the surrender the mother's vote was on the side of right.

But, though we may indulge *some* hope, as regards both Jehoiachin and his mother, yet it must be confessed that it is but a slender one in the face of the awful words of Jeremiah: "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; and I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans; and I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare

thee, into another country, where ye were not born ; and there shall ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return" (Jer. xxii. 24-27). Words could hardly be more severe than these. Jehoiachin and his mother are spoken of, not as going out voluntarily, but as being cast out. If they went by their own will, their will was constrained by God. It is a question we cannot decide.

But what a fate for the grandson of good king Josiah ! At eighteen years of age he lost his kingdom, and was carried away to Babylon, and for seven and thirty years he remained a prisoner. Thus the main part of his life was spent in captivity. He was one of the many kings whom the conqueror had dethroned, and who lived at his court as prisoners. His mother died, and children were born to him, but he was a captive still. All the prime of his life he spent in prison, a dethroned king, one among many such.

Nothing is told us of his prison-life ; what his treatment was, what degree of liberty or comfort he enjoyed, or what were his thoughts. We can but conjecture his state of mind. It was a long chastisement for the sins of a short reign. Did he profit by it ? As a child he must have known Josiah : did he now remember his grandfather ? Did what he had known of him now come back to his mind, in contrast with his father's course, and his own ? He had much time for thought—long, sad, years : did he think aright ? Did he repent,

and seek God? We read of a far worse king, Manasseh, his own ancestor, that he was bound with fetters, and carried to Babylon, and that "when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). May we think that Jehoiachin repented too?

The sequel gives us hope. After a long reign, during the greater part of which Jehoiachin was his prisoner, king Nebuchadnezzar died, and was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach. And now came a great change for Jehoiachin. In the first year of his reign the new king "did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison; and he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; and changed his prison garments; and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life" (2 Kings xxv. 27-30).

When *Manasseh* repented and sought God, "the Lord was entreated of him," and allowed him time and opportunity to undo in part the evil he had done, and to restore the worship of the Lord: reasoning backwards from mercy to repentance, we may hope that the kindness shown to Jehoiachin in his later years was preceded by his repentance. For it was God who disposed Evil-merodach to kindness, as it was from God that the mercy shown

to Manasseh came. It would not be according to His usual dealings, that Jehoiachin should find peace and comfort in his last years, if he continued in hardness of heart.

Looking on Evil-merodach as God's instrument of mercy, we are less concerned with his own motives; yet it is interesting to think of the new king making it one of the earliest acts of his reign to comfort the captive-king. He was but fifty-five years of age, not much past the prime of life; but thirty-seven years of captivity had, we may suppose, made him an old man before his time. True, those captive-kings were still in some respects treated as kings, for each had his throne; to have *kings* as captives increased the conqueror's glory: but they lived in a prison, and wore prison-clothes, and ate prison-food; it was no life of ease and comfort that Jehoiachin had lived for seven and thirty years, and doubtless the life had told on his looks. The eye of Evil-merodach singled him out from the rest. He knew him to be no petty chief, like most of the others, but one of a long line of true kings; and his noble Jewish features, and his grey hairs, and his worn and wasted face and figure, filled the young king of Babylon with respectful pity. There is much pathos in the words "he spake kindly to him"; it was long since the captive-king had heard words of kindness; and from that time his life was a life of plenty and ease and comparative freedom. We know not how much longer he lived; perhaps for years.

If Jehoiachin was indeed penitent, then those years were the happiest of his life. Unless his mother made it so, his childhood was not happy, with such a father as Jehoiakim; and his short reign, after he came to reign alone, was nothing but war and fear. Now he was at least safe and at peace; no longer a king, it is true, but he had found that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and this uncrowned king (practically so) was far happier without his crown; his wants were supplied, and he was treated with respect and kindness. If, besides, he had forsaken idols, and turned to the Lord, then indeed Jehoiachin's last days were by far his best and happiest.

Yet, even supposing this to have been the case, Jehoiachin, this "despised broken idol," this thirty-seven-years captive, furnishes a warning against weakness of character. For such appears to have been his character; not wicked so much as weak; not a daring rebel against God, leading others astray, but one who was himself easily led, following without resistance in the evil way in which he found himself placed.

One of such a character often does as much harm as the daringly wicked. Bold wickedness, while it prevails with some, terrifies and repels others; one who slides into evil ways, from want of strength to resist, is likely to lead others to slide with him. His character does not shock or frighten. He is called perhaps "a good easy man." The "easy" is true, but the "good" is not true.

Some are by natural character *leaders*, and some *followers*; but followers as well as leaders have a choice to make between good and evil. "Be ye followers of *me*," says St. Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. iv. 16); and to the Thessalonians, "Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord" (1 Thess. i. 6).

But oh! the long suffering of God, and His compassion and mercy. A veil is drawn over those seven and thirty years of captivity. We know not at what time Jehoiachin repented, if he did repent. It was at the end of that long time that he was restored; when was it that he repented? If early, then it pleased God to chastise him by years of bondage. If late, then God in His mercy waited long for his turning. In either case God did not forget the weak and faulty captive. His eye was upon him, and in mercy.

If you too have turned to God, be not surprised if He chasten you long. Be not impatient under His hand; and do not doubt that, if indeed you have sought mercy in Christ, you have not sought in vain: He has been very patient towards you; be you also patient and submissive under His hand.

Not till after seven and thirty years of captivity was Jehoiachin's head lifted up out of prison; then at last relief came. You have to do with a far more merciful king than Evil-merodach; yet do not provoke Him to leave you captive. Perhaps you are now a willing captive to sin or the world; perhaps

you cling to some idol—some unlawful gain or pleasure or pursuit, some sin, some self-indulgence, some earthly object which you let be first in your affection. Turn to God, and burst your chains. Christ, the Deliverer, can set you free. It is not too late. Thirty-seven years formed a great part of a lifetime, yet Jehoiachin (a prisoner by his own fault) was taken from prison at last : seek the Lord, even from your prison. Seek Him through Jesus Christ ; seek Him *now*, though so late. It is late indeed, but not *too* late.



THE MEN PLACED BY THE KING OF ASSYRIA IN SAMARIA.

SHALMANESER, king of Assyria, conquered Hoshea, king of Israel, and carried away his people as captives, and settled them in Halah and Habor and the cities of the Medes. In their stead, he brought men from Babylon, and Cuthah, and Ava, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and planted them in the cities of Samaria, "and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof" (2 Kings xvii).

These men were heathen, though in practice hardly more so than the men of Israel into whose place they came; it was for their idolatrous practices that they were dispossessed and carried away. But the new-comers were heathen, born and bred. When therefore they first came into Samaria, they began by worshipping idols only, as before, "they feared not the Lord," they gave no worship to

Jehovah. For this God punished them; "the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them."

It was the ignorant belief of the heathen of those times (as it is now in some heathen lands) that each country had its own gods; they did not know the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of the whole earth. So, when the lions came, they took it as a punishment sent by the God of the land for their not worshipping him, and they made this petition to the king of Assyria: "The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land."

The king of Assyria, as ignorant and superstitious as they, listened to their petition. He sent back one of the priests who had been carried away from Samaria; "and he came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord," instructed these heathen strangers in the worship of Jehovah.

But there was no real change, no turning from idols to serve the living and the true God. They were as dark as ever, though they now added, the worship of God to the worship of their idols. We saw that the new-comers came from different parts—"from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim"; so now "every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which

the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim."

With all this they mixed the worship of Jehovah, as if He were but the equal of Nergal or Ashima, or Adrammelech. "So they feared the Lord," the history goes on, "and made unto themselves of the lowest of their priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence"—or rather, "who carried them away from thence."

"Unto this day," the history proceeds, "they do after the former manners"—unto this day, that is, up to the time when the history was written. But long after that—700 years after—their descendants still held a corrupt creed, and gave to God but a mixed worship. Our Lord found the Samaritans in this state. He said to the woman of Samaria, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John iv. 22); thus placing the mixed religion of Samaria in contrast with the purer creed of Jerusalem.

To go back to the history (2 Kings xvii), it is striking to notice a change of words, where one verse seems to contradict the verse before; but

only *seems*; it is all one consistent story. In verse thirty-three we read, "They feared the Lord"; but in the very next verse (describing the state of things at the time when the history was written) we find, "they fear *not* the Lord." How are we to understand this seeming contradiction? It is not difficult. The thirty-third verse goes on, "they feared the Lord, *and served their own gods*"; the thirty-fourth verse proceeds thus, "they fear *not* the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; with whom the Lord had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall *not* fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: but the Lord, . . . Him shall ye fear, and Him shall ye worship, and to Him shall ye do sacrifice."

Outwardly, "they feared the Lord"; but in reality, and in His sight "they fear *not* the Lord"; because with His worship they mixed the worship of idols, and a mixed worship and a divided service the Lord will not accept. In His sight they feared Him *not*, because He had said, "Ye shall worship the Lord thy God, and Him *only* shalt thou serve," "Ye shall *not* serve other gods;" and this commandment they broke. Therefore their service of Him was no service in His sight.

The Lord does not change. What He was then, *He is now*; and that which He required then, He

still requires; a divided heart He will not accept, a half-service is in His sight no service. "No man can serve two masters"; none can worship two gods, for there is but One; and in no heart can two thrones be set up.

How often in His Word does God teach us this! Yet how many are still trying to do this impossible thing! Impossible, because He with whom the decision rests says it cannot be; He whose will is supreme will not have it so. Alas, how many *Samaritans* there are still! Yet of them all, notwithstanding all pretence and self-delusion, *this* is the truth—"they fear not the Lord."

Would any king accept a divided allegiance? Would any Government allow a man to be the subject, half of one country and half of another? When any one is naturalized, he gives up his old country, and adopts the new instead; he would be taken in on no other terms. Will God put up with less than man? Will the King of kings have a half-subject? Will the Lord go shares with idols?

You, who have only lately begun to think seriously, and to show yourselves Christians, be sure you give to God your whole heart. You have been transplanted from the world into a new kingdom; do not mix the old with the new; cast off the old altogether, and serve God fully.

You, who are in danger of making an idol of some earthly object—gain, pleasure, amusement—or of some worthier object, some one in your

family, some one justly dear to you, take warning by the Samaritans. Set up no idol of any kind in your heart; let God reign there alone. He forbids you no lawful pleasure in moderation, and no lawful gain; and it is He himself who has bestowed on you the gift of love to others, and He would have you love dearly those whom He has bound to you by close ties; yet let all your pursuits and all your affections be kept in subjection to your love to God, and your regard to His will. Beware of a divided service. Serve the Lord wholly, and love Him with all your heart.

Why *wish* for other gods beside the Lord? Why hanker after another service, when He has graciously taken you into His? Is not He enough? What could their idols do for the Samaritans—whereas Jehovah was able and willing to do all for them? Riches and pleasures, worldly success, and honour, and glory, will not make you happy; even family affection, if *inordinate*, will often disappoint you; but the single-hearted fear and love of God never will. He will not regard you as worshipping *Him*, if you are at the same time giving worship to some other object; but give Him your heart, your whole heart, and then words cannot tell what He will give to *you*.



THE DAUGHTER OF HERODIAS.

WE do not know even her name for certain. All we know is that one evening, as a girl, she danced before King Herod, and pleased him so much that he rashly promised to give her whatever she should ask for as a reward, and that she—instigated by her mother—asked for, and obtained, the head of John the Baptist.

The part she bore in this great crime is all we know of her. But her part in it was so important that she comes prominently before us. What were her own feelings and motives we know not, but it was she who made choice of such a reward, and so actually did the wicked deed.

But oh! what a mother the girl had, and what a bringing up! She was probably hardly more than a child when this happened, and her childhood had been spent with a wicked, revengeful and cruel woman as her mother. Herodias was nothing less than a *murderess*; and she had been the trainer of this girl.

We shudder at what she did, we are shocked at

a young girl asking that a good man should be killed and his bleeding head be given to her. The wicked mother rejoiced thus to get rid of her reprover; what the girl felt we do not know; she may have shared in her mother's joy and triumph. Painters have chosen this for a subject; and one great painter especially has painted a celebrated picture of John the Baptist's head on a charger. It is wonderful as a painting, but the subject is so revolting that we look even at the picture with horror: yet we do not read of this young girl having any feeling of horror when she looked on the reality.

But had such a mother instilled one right feeling into her. She had taught her to dance; what else had she taught her? One single good thing? It shocks us, that a girl should ask for such a gift, and look at such a sight; but innocent childhood is easily corrupted, and youthful delicacy and pity may soon, by a constant evil influence, be turned into hard and callous cruelty. To such an influence and such an example this unhappy girl had been exposed.

Think of a godly English home. Think of the influence of a pious mother over her daughters, or over an only daughter. Think of the prayers from infancy at the mother's knee, the Bible stories told by a mother's voice, the early lessons, the gentle teaching, the wise and loving discipline, the holy life of the mother in the sight of the child; all with one object, to draw the young heart to

God. Think of this, and contrast it with the case of this mother and daughter! How could grapes be gathered from such thorns, or figs from these thistles? How could such training and example bear any but vile and poisonous fruit?

In our indignation at the wicked mother, we almost let the daughter go out of our sight. A mother prompting her child to sin, and even *commanding* her to commit a great crime, fixes the thoughts in horror on the mother, and leads us almost to overlook the child. Yet it was the child who actually made the choice. *Could* she have done otherwise? Could she have braved the anger of such a woman, and refused? With her mind filled with eager desire for rich jewels, and costly dresses, and thinking only to take her mother's advice as to which of such delightful things she should choose, was it in her power to decline to ask instead for the head of John the Baptist?

Why should this one case be taken out from the general rule? Why should we think that Salome (if that were her name) was free from the obligation to do right? Girl as she was, she had a personal responsibility; though but a child, she had a will of her own to exercise. Whether old or young, we cannot be *forced* to do evil. We may have to *suffer* for refusing, but we *may* refuse. So, though Herodias was more guilty, Salome was not guiltless.

But are not children bound to obey their parents? Yes, unless their commands clash with those of

God. In that case they must obey God rather than man. This mother might have ill-treated, or even killed the girl for refusing; still she might have refused. Better to disobey a wicked mother than to sin against God.

This is an extreme case. But, in more ordinary cases, in common life, take care, mothers, what orders you give to your children. Be sure you do not bid them do anything that is against the law of God. Look to it that your orders, your suggestions, your advice, your influence and example, be such as to lead them to love and fear God, not such as to tempt them to sin against Him. Is the young heart beginning to feel an influence from above? Has your child been impressed by the Word of God? Have some words she has heard struck home? Has her *Confirmation* been blest to her? Does she show some desire to give up the pleasures of the world, and turn to God with her whole heart? Oh, do not quench that smoking flax, do not damp those new-born thoughts, do not try to persuade her against her conscience, do not call those feelings *morbid* which bear every appearance of the work of the Spirit. Help her in her choice, do not hinder her. Advise her, but advise her *well*.

A woman leading an abandoned life has been known to take all possible care that her child should not know of her way of living, or even come within sight of sin. "My child shall never be what her mother is!" she would say.

But, daughters (and sons too) while you owe a sacred duty to your parents, your duty to God is still higher. It was He who commanded you to honour your parents; yet you must honour Him *first*. Never go against your father or mother's will, unless it be clear that their will is against the will of God. Give up your own will to theirs without a murmur, do what they bid you, abstain from that which they forbid, try to please them rather than yourselves, honour and obey them; but never go against the will of God, even when a father or mother bids you, and never follow even your parents in evil-doing. The same Word which tells you to honour your father and mother says this too: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me": it was the Lord Himself who said that, and you are His disciples.

But was there ever a more rash and foolish promise than that of Herod? The girl pleased him with her dancing, and he (heated no doubt with wine) gave her leave to ask for any reward she liked, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee"; and, with Eastern exaggeration, he added with an oath, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." Half the kingdom, for one evening's dancing! He would have been sorry to be taken at his word.

Rewards which bear no proportion to the service done are still not unknown. For one evening's performance, a famous singer, or actor, or dancer, will

sometimes receive more than a servant's wages for a whole year, more than the salary of a tutor or governess, more than a *curate's* stipend—the recompense for a whole year's labour as a minister of the Gospel! How many families might be fed by what is paid for singing one song! How many good works might be helped, how might a struggling charity be strengthened, a distant mission carried through difficulty and want, by that which a *prima donna* earns in one evening! Yet some of those who willingly pay a large sum for an Opera-box, will turn a deaf ear to an appeal on behalf of *missions*, though in the one case it is but an hour or two's gratification of eye or ear that is concerned, in the other the Saviour's parting command, the glory of God, the giving light to the dark, and happiness to the wretched, and salvation to the lost—the greatest work in all the world!

We have small means of following this history further; one evening comprises all we know from Scripture of this girl. Yet she was young, and life was before her; she must have lived her life, and died her death. What sort of life and death, with such a mother, and after such an evening, we fear to think. Josephus tells something of her outward life; her inward life and character is hidden from us.

Life is before all the young, life and death. Of what kind? What sort of women will the girls grow up to be? What life will they lead? What death will they die? Most have far greater ad-

vantages than this girl had; few there are, who have so evil an example, so vile a mother. We shall be judged according to what we have received; and of those who have received much, will much be required. A Christian home, a godly training, a pious mother! Oh, what will be required of those who have these?

Daughters of such a family, and sons too, open your eyes, and see what you have received, and think what God will ask in return. You have a choice set before you; in your youth you have a decision to make. Make a right choice. Decide for your mother's God and Saviour. Drink in her words. Tread in her steps. With a pious mother, you will never find a clashing between her directions and God's commands. A dancing girl, who made a wicked and cruel choice, is set before you as one to whom you are to be utterly unlike. Do you, with your better training, seek to be Christ's servants in your youth, and to grow up in His faith and love and obedience, so as to be through all your life Christian men and women.



THE OTHER SEVENTY.

ALL that we know of these seventy is their being sent forth, and what they did when they were sent, and their coming back. Who they were, except that they were disciples of our Lord, we are not told ; and not one name among them do we know. St. Luke is the only one of the Evangelists who even mentions them (Luke x. 1-20).

They were not *Apostles*: that name is usually confined to the twelve, and these are mentioned as *other* than the twelve. The Lord had sent forth the twelve some months before He sent the seventy. True, the twelve were chosen from the disciples, and so were the seventy, but there was a difference.

Yet in many respects there was a likeness. Besides being, like the twelve, chosen from the general body of disciples, they were sent forth by the Lord himself, and sent with much the same directions ;

like those sent before, these also were to make no provision for the journey, to preach and to heal, not to go from house to house, and not to stay in a place that received them ill. Like the twelve, they were gifted with special powers; they found themselves able, not only to heal the sick but to cast out devils. Thus they were much like the Apostles, and yet were not of their number. They did in some respects Apostles' work, but they were not called by that name.

It is remarkable that, while we are familiar with the names of the twelve, we are quite ignorant of those of the seventy. It is possible that some names we meet with later, in the Acts and the Epistles, are the names of some of the seventy, for we cannot doubt that they continued Christ's disciples; but we cannot identify them. We know all the twelve; we know not one of the seventy. They were not meant to be known. They were sent on a special work, and that special and probably only temporary work they did. The Apostles were gifted with the Spirit, and permanently endued with power from on high; they were Divinely appointed teachers for all time; the Church was built upon them and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. Nothing of all this was the case with the seventy. Though for a limited time they could work miracles, it does not appear that they always could; and there is no reason to suppose that they were *inspired*. They were sent before Him by our Lord

to the places to which He himself was shortly going ; and, for the purpose of preparing His way, they were gifted with extraordinary powers. It appears that even they themselves did not know, when they set out, that they would be enabled to cast out devils ; they were simply told to heal the sick, and proclaim the kingdom of God ; and they came back astonished and joyful at the power which they had found themselves to possess. " Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name ! " (x. 17).

" Through Thy name." They laid claim to no power of their own ; what they had done, they had done by the power of their Lord's name. This shows of what spirit these seventy were ; and then it was that the powers bestowed on them were confirmed and extended. " Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy : and nothing shall by any means hurt you " (x. 19). It seems from this that their work was then not yet finished ; but still it was limited, and so was their power. As long as their special mission lasted, their special protection should last, and their special power.

If, however, the seventy do not, like the twelve, occupy the *first* place among the servants of the Lord, we are not wrong in giving them the *second*. They were chosen men, chosen and sent by the Lord himself, sent forth as His fore-runners, and gifted with special powers. As the preparers of His way, they may be likened to John the Baptist ;

and, like him, when they had fulfilled their work, they retired, and we hear no more of them.

Of the extraordinary powers with which they were gifted, the chief was that the devils were put in subjection to them, and it was in this they chiefly rejoiced. But there was another thing for which they were to rejoice yet *more*: "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (x. 20). Each of those seventy was a chosen vessel. Before they were employed in this service, they themselves had been enrolled as disciples, accepted as believers, and their names written in heaven. Of this the Lord himself assured them, and in this above all they were to rejoice.

Is it true of all those who are actively employed in the Lord's service, highly gifted, filling an important post, and made of great use in the kingdom of God upon earth—is it true of all such that their "names are written in heaven"? This is not for us to know. But it is a question which all such would do well to ask regarding themselves. For great gifts and a high office on the one hand, and the name written in heaven on the other, do by no means always go together. It needs much watchfulness on the part of the highly-gifted and highly-placed, to keep *humble*; and there is danger of confounding gifts and place and usefulness with the work of God in the heart. The natural pride of the heart, and the praise of our fellow-men join to make this danger. Let those whom God endows

richly and employs widely be aware of this ; and let them seek above all things to have Scriptural proof, and the witness of the Spirit, that they themselves are the Lord's, and that their names are written in heaven.

Our happiness is, that, with no special gifts and no high place and no eminent work or service, we may yet have this greater blessing and joy, that our names are written there. The humblest, and he who fills the lowest place and works in the narrowest sphere, may have this joy. Our Lord, when He said, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven," did not speak to the seventy only, but to all who do like them believe. The names of all true believers are written in "the Book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xiii. 8), "the Book" mentioned in Daniel (Dan. xii. 1), that "other book . . . which is the Book of life" (Rev. xx. 12), that Book of life from which it is promised by our Lord that the name of him that overcometh shall not be blotted out (Rev. iii. 5). The names that are in this Book of life are "written in *heaven*." It is the *Lamb's* Book of life, and it was He who bade His disciples rejoice that their names were written there.

Do you believe in Him, and love Him, and desire to follow Him? Have you given Him your heart, and do you seek to abide in Him, and cleave to Him? Then do not fear to believe that He bids you rejoice. He has written your name in His book, and He would have you be glad.

Oh, what is earthly honour and glory to *this*? What are riches and pleasures to *this*? What are gifts, and talents, and powers of mind, and influence over others, and even knowledge and ability in spiritual things, compared with *this*? "*Rather* rejoice that your names are written in heaven!" Yes, far rather. Let all else pass, so this may remain! And remain it *will*. For He who is the Truth said, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels" (Rev. iii. 5).

He himself will enable us to overcome. "They overcame . . . by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. xii. 11). "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25). "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Cor. xv. 57).

There is no presumption in a joy that is based on the promises of God. It is a false humility that shrinks from accepting, humbly and gratefully, that which our Lord and Saviour has done for us, and assured us of.

This is the joy that in great measure lifts the Christian above the cares and sorrows of life; this it is that gives him hope and comfort—that his name is written in heaven. His treasure is there, his heart is there, his *name* is there. He will not be forgotten or overlooked. When the Book is opened,

his name will be found. How soon will care and trouble be past! How soon will he look back on what now distresses him, as gone and done with for ever! Let him be tried and afflicted, yet his name is written in heaven. Let him find this world a "vale of tears," yet his name is in heaven. And soon *he* will be there, with his Lord, safe and sinless and happy for ever. "Rejoice then, because your names are written in heaven!" Lift up your hearts, dry your tears, let not anxiety and sorrow weigh you to the dust. "Your names are written in heaven." Even now, rejoice for it.



THE CHIEF PRIESTS WHO WISHED TO PUT LAZARUS TO DEATH.

HE who was the Light of the World was the chief actor in the raising of Lazarus; Lazarus himself too was a light, as being a disciple of Jesus, and loving Him; but what is to be said of these priests? They were not light, but darkness. The light of our Lord, and the lesser light of Lazarus, do by contrast make the black wickedness of these men to be dark indeed. They appear in deep shade. Yet, they may warn.

Was there ever greater wickedness? What had Lazarus done, that he should be killed? They might hate the Lord; but why hate Lazarus? He had done nothing to offend them, not a word had he spoken against them, they were in no danger of losing their power by any act of his.

Not by any *act*, it is true, yet through what had happened to him they might. Jesus had raised him from the grave, and all the people

knew it. As long as he lived, he was a standing witness to the power of the Lord. Therefore he must be got rid of; and there was but one way, he must *die*. An innocent man, just brought back to life, must die, in order that none should be able to point to him, and say, "That is the man whom Jesus of Nazareth raised from the dead."

We know none of these men individually, except Caiaphas. He who (not knowing the full meaning of what he said) used this argument for killing Jesus, that "it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John xi. 50), he would now add Lazarus; not *one* man, but *two*, should die for the people. It was a murderous plan. The very wish and purpose made Caiaphas and the rest murderers.

But did they become so *all at once*? These spiritual rulers and guides, these teachers of the law, had they *always* been thus bent on destroying Jesus, and would they always have been ready to kill the innocent, in order to get rid of a witness to His power? This is not likely. An old proverb says, "No man becomes a great rascal all at once." Probably those men arrived by steps at such a point of wickedness.

True, it is early in His history that we read of the people of Nazareth seeking to kill our Lord (Luke iv. 29): but this was a sudden outbreak, not a deliberate plan; and those were the congregation

in a Galilean synagogue, not the Council at Jerusalem. The priests began by murmuring at what He said and did, and disputing against His words. They early hated Him; but at first probably they did not plot to *kill* Him. We cannot indeed read the seventh and eighth chapters of St. John without seeing their deadly hatred; and we read there that the Pharisees "sought to take Him"; and, when they saw how He prevailed with the people, they and the priests sent officers to take Him. They even "took up stones to cast at Him." Every miracle increased their rage, every word incensed them the more. But though they hated Him, and would gladly have got Him out of the way by any means, they did not at first in solemn conclave decree His death, and form plans for bringing it about.

But one who hardens his heart, and resists the Gospel, and will not listen to the Saviour's voice, never knows to what lengths of opposition he may go. At first his conscience is pricked; but he hardens himself, and goes on as before; then he learns to *hate* all words that strike home, and begins to argue against them, and to profess (and try to feel) unbelief in them; and now he comes to dislike the ministers of God, because they are His ministers, and speak His word; now he opens his lips against them on all occasions, and will find a flaw (if he can) in their conduct. Perhaps he does really come to believe less and less, till he ends at last in absolute

unbelief and deadly opposition. He did not think at first that he should come to this; he did not mean to. But he entered on a downward course, when first he set himself against believing.

Badmen have their degrees of badness. Doubtless in the Council of the Jews there were better and worse. There were some who did not readily come into the idea of killing Jesus, and were half disposed to side with Joseph of Arimathea; still less were they ready to put the innocent *Lazarus* to death. Even with the worst this was a new idea, a growth out of their murderous design against *Jesus*: there must have been some one author of this new idea—was it *Caiaphas*?—and possibly he had some difficulty in getting a majority in favour of his plan. I can fancy a look of horror on the face of some in the Council, when first the idea of killing an innocent man (well known to all present) was broached.

But a strong will prevailed. The counsellors of evil were determined, the hangers-back were weak. It must be done: *Lazarus* must die, as well as *Jesus*. Many a conscience was wounded by that decision; many a head tossed uneasily on the pillow that night. The beginnings of evil, as well as of strife, are as when one letteth out water. None can tell with what resistless strength evil may come on.

This desperate wickedness is a great warning. Some may think that it is too bad to be a warning at all. "Who," they ask, "can be in danger of *this*?

Who is capable of murdering an innocent man, in order to put an inconvenient witness out of the way?" But, if not of *that*, you may be in danger of doing some other wrong thing, from which at first you shrink, if you yield to the beginnings of evil.

This applies to sin of every kind—envy and hatred, covetousness, selfishness, or callous hard-heartedness, cruelty, lust. They all have their stages, from the first to the last. A *child* may be selfish, envious, covetous, about a *toy*; let those who have the care of that child try to nip the evil in the bud; or, not only will the selfish or envious child grow into a selfish or envious man or woman, but long indulgence will make the evil continually to increase. Unless it be checked and overcome, the same person will be *more* selfish in old age than in middle age or youth. There was a beginning to this; and the beginning was not checked.

There have been known persons callous to the sufferings of others, and some even seeming to delight in them, who once could not bear to see any one suffer, and would faint at the sight of blood. The Indian mutiny, it is said, developed in some of our soldiers—and, I fear, in some officers too—a spirit of revenge and cruelty that seemed quite contrary to their natural disposition. The young English recruit, or the boy-officer, did not get to this but by degrees; but the beginning was neglected, and the evil grew by indulgence, till

at length to "pot a pandy" (a horrible expression) became a pastime, and it was a pleasure to be present when a mutineer and murderer was to be blown from a cannon!

A person of strong and determined will, one who *will* have what he desires, at whatever cost, may also take warning by these Jewish plotters. They would stick at nothing. Lazarus was in their way, and Lazarus must be got rid of. In one at least of them there was a strong will; the chief mover in that scheme was determined to have his way. Rightly directed, and kept under control by principle, a strong will is valuable; few great things are done without. But ill-directed and ungoverned, we see in this case what a strong will led to, and this case is a type of many. Self and pride are often at the root of a determined will.

Even when the object is right, the servant of God must put the will of God above his own. We are not entitled to say about anything "I *will* have it." We are to be active, energetic, and persevering; not easily daunted, not lightly giving up what seems to be a good object: yet we must keep our will so flexible as to bend to the will of God, and we must be ready to give up our plan when it seems clear that it is not God's plan. A strong will, that will take no denial, is apt to lead a person astray. If right means will not get him that which he is determined to have, there is danger that wrong means will be resorted to. The case in

question is an extreme case; but extreme cases have a bearing on ordinary cases. *There* the aim was wicked, and the step proposed was wicked: it may well be that an aim far less wicked, or not wicked at all, or even a good aim (pursued in this spirit) may betray the mind and conscience, and lead one to do what once he would have been shocked at the very thought of.



THE TWO DISCIPLES SENT FOR THE COLT.

THERE were three disciples, whom our Lord was pleased to single out from the rest, when He was to go through a great trouble, or would do some special work. The Apostles Peter, James, and John, were the only three who were with Him in the garden of Gethsemane; and these three were the only ones He took with Him, when He raised the Ruler of the Synagogue's daughter.

When He was about to enter Jerusalem, it pleased Him to do so in humble triumph, seated on an ass, according to the prophecy. Two of His disciples were appointed to go and fetch the ass from the neighbouring village. We are not told their names. Probably they were not Apostles, but disciples only; two out of that number from whom the Apostles were chosen. But it was a special work, though humble; and two special servants were chosen for it.

This is the Lord's usual way. He has many

servants, and He chooses whom He will for particular acts of service. Some are chosen out for great work and great scenes, as those three ; some are employed in a lower way, like these two. In both cases the choice was made by the Lord himself. He sent these two for the colt, just as He sent the twelve to preach and heal, and chose the three to be near Him in His agony. It is happy, when we are employed in some lower task, to bear in mind that it is *He* that sets us to that task. His orders make the lowest to be a noble and honourable work.

Never murmur at having to do such work as seems beneath your powers ; never be discontented with the place you have to fill, or the work you have to do. Sometimes one who is conscious of having considerable gifts finds himself set to fill a humble place and do simple work ; and admiring friends say, "*Any one* could do what *you* have to do : what a pity that you are not in some sphere more worthy of your abilities !" and too often the person's own heart echoes the saying.

But does not the Sovereign Ruler of all know best ? Is not He who is omniscient a far better Judge than you or your flattering friends ? And besides, are you not His *servant*, and has He not the absolute right to employ you as He pleases ? Is the servant to choose his place, or the workman his work ? Are we not at our Master's disposal ?

These two disciples teach us a lesson of unquestioning obedience. Just as they were told to do, they did ; they went to fetch the colt.

Think what they might have done, had they been of another spirit. Had they been like some servants of men, or, alas, some servants of *God*, they might have questioned the order. "How do we know that the ass will be there? Why should the owner let it come with us, if it *is* there? Why should *we* go? Will not a *boy* do for such a thing as this? Must two grown-up men go to fetch an ass?"

But they asked no such questions, and made no such objections. They had no thought but to obey. They went and did as they were told; and just as it had been said, so they found. The ass was tied there ready; the owner was willing; and they came back bringing it with them.

When our Lord commands, unquestioning obedience is our duty; and when He makes it plain that it is *we* who are to do any particular service, then that becomes our special duty. When God sends *us*, we must not wish another sent instead, so that we might engage in some work more congenial.

Unquestioning obedience is what we owe to *God*; to man our obedience should be qualified. When man gives his orders, we are bound to ask whether they are in agreement with God's. Servants are told to obey their masters; but they must obey God first. Children are to obey their parents; but "in the Lord." But all *God's* commandments are perfectly right and good; and all the errands on which our Master sends us, and all the work in

which He employs us, are without one shade of wrong or mistake. Therefore to God our obedience must be unquestioning. There must be no "Why?" Enough for us, that our Lord bids us.

This unquestioning obedience is founded on *faith*. Those two were simple-minded men, who had not a thought but of just going where they were sent, and doing what they were told; they fully believed that they would find the ass, and that the owner would let them take it. This simplicity and faith, this unquestioning obedience, are just what *we* should show. But we are often wise in our own conceits, and foresee difficulties, and calculate probabilities, and look forward to consequences. What have we to do with consequences, or difficulties, or probabilities, when the command is plain? Faith does not calculate; faith obeys. Faith does not weigh likelihoods, or apprehend obstacles; faith believes. Faith asks no questions; faith follows the directions given. Simple-minded men are our example; even children teach us to believe and obey.

Picture to yourself these two returning. They are soon back. The village was near—it was Bethphage—and they had lost no time. And they brought the colt with them, and soon Jesus was seated thereon, and all turned out as they had been told. They had never doubted that it would; and so indeed it did.

"But this was such a simple matter!" True, but it will be just so in more complicated matters, if there

be the like faith and obedience. All matters are simple to our Lord ; with Him there are no complications. You call it simple, and so it was ; but was it *easy*? Could you have made the owners willing? Why, that alone was an exercise of Divine power. And the same Divine power will be exerted in every case in which the servants of God go forth to do His will, in obedience to His orders, relying on His word.

Many works fail, because there was no order given. And many, because faith failed. And many, because the obedience was not unquestioning, but hesitating and doubting, and calculating. If we set *ourselves* to work, and go where we ourselves choose to go, and use our own wisdom, and trust in our own strength, no wonder we fail. Those two disciples were to fetch a colt—that was all ; let us, in their spirit, go and fetch what we are sent for, and do what we are told to do, and doubtless we too shall come back with our colt, and the Lord will deign to make use of what we bring Him, and all will turn to His honour and glory. Even to fetch a colt is an honourable service, if done at His command.



BARABBAS.

NOW Barabbas was a robber"; so writes St. John (John xviii. 40). From St. Mark and St. Luke we learn more: St. Mark says "there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection" (Mark xv. 7). St. Matthew says only, "they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas" (Matt. xxvii. 16). St. Peter, addressing the people in Solomon's porch, called him "*a murderer*" (Acts iii. 14).

If this were all, Barabbas would be no more to us than any other bold, bad man. There were thousands of such then, and they are not wanting now. He may, it is true, have been no ordinary criminal, but a leading spirit among such men. "A notable prisoner" means, one who had made himself known by his daring crimes, a man whose name was in the mouths of the people, well known,

and perhaps even admired by some. He "lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him." He was the leader, they were his companions and followers. Some people, especially an ignorant multitude, will make a hero of a bold, bad man ; and his very crimes, if he show courage and daring, cast a romance about his name, and make him a popular favourite. Thus, when Pilate gave them the choice what prisoner he should release to them, the cry was for Barabbas.

Thus far the story does not differ from others. There have been other such popular heroes, men known only by their daring crimes, yet favourites on that very account.

But the story goes beyond this. There is one feature in it which separates it from other histories, and, while thousands and thousands of criminals, as bold and bad as Barabbas, have long been forgotten, has caused this name to be handed down from generation to generation, and given it a place in the word of God. The feature is this, that he was preferred to the Lord Jesus ; "not this man, but Barabbas!" was the cry of the people ; "away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas."

Making all allowance for the wicked misleading of the priests and elders, yet was there ever such a choice made—so blind, so wrong, so utterly against all reason and justice and right? "Not this man—not *him*—but Barabbas!" The two are compared, brought into competition in the minds of the people, and they reject the good, and

will have the bad ; the murderer shall be set free, the life-giver shall be put to death.

It is this that makes Barabbas notorious. He was “a *notable* prisoner” *then* ; he is more notable *now*. And this is what he is known for—that he was preferred to Jesus. His robberies, and murders, and insurrection, have passed away, like other such things, but this will never pass away—that he was preferred to Jesus. His name lasts so long, only from its connexion with another name, the “name which is above every name.” God the Father set the name of His blessed Son so high ; man put it below that of a murderer.

Let us also make a comparison. We have seen what Barabbas was ; now who and what was “this Man,” the rejected One, He who was out of favour with the people ?

He was the Son of God, come down from heaven to save sinful men. He had taken man’s nature, and become poor, that we might be rich. As man He had taken the form, not of the rich and great, but of a servant. Though Lord of all, He had made Himself one of the poor of this world ; not even Barabbas was lower in station than He. But, while Barabbas led a wicked life, Jesus was holy and without sin. And while Barabbas rebelled and robbed, and killed, Jesus went about doing good. Barabbas had no pity ; what he wished for, that, as a robber, he *took* ; and those who stood in his way, them, as a *murderer*, he *slew*. Jesus had pity and love for all ; He healed and comforted, and gave

sight and hearing, and made the lame to walk, and cast out devils, and even raised the dead; further, He forgave sins, and received the outcast, and made numbers happy; for the cases we read of are but samples of the whole. And now He was going to *die*. But He did not ask the people to beg that He might be spared instead of Barabbas. He was *willing* to die. He had come to die; for *our* sins; to pay our debt, to make our peace, to bring us to God.

All this difference was there between Jesus and Barabbas; and much more; for words cannot describe the gulf that lay between a great sinner and the Holy One of God. Yet the people chose Barabbas! "Not this man, but Barabbas!"

Were they blind and deaf? Had they no understanding, that they thus put *evil* for good and good for evil? Had they not seen Jesus in their city, and heard His voice in their streets, and known what He did? Did they forget the blind, the deaf, the lame, who now walked, and heard and saw, and all because of *Him*? How was it that the priests could persuade them against their own knowledge, and sense, and memory? How was it that a few malicious words from the lips of those false teachers could prevail against all?

We are amazed at such a choice. "Not this man, but Barabbas" fills us with wonder and horror: that they should kill the Prince of life, and desire a murderer to be granted to them! But it was the God of this world that blinded the minds

of those that believed not. The priests and elders were Satan's agents. God allowed Satan great power, and let him blind the eyes of many. But the guilt was theirs. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John iii. 19).

Is this true still? Yes. Satan still blinds the eyes of numbers; though light is come into the world, the true light, yet many love darkness rather than light; and "not this man, but Barabbas," is their choice, if not their cry.

But Barabbas was a *robber*, and a *murderer*! True; but we may make free with his name, and apply it to other objects of choice, besides this actual man. The main point about Barabbas is that he was preferred to Jesus; therefore whatever is preferred to Jesus may be called a *Barabbas*. Robbery and murder are not the only things that are contrary to God's holy will. The spirit of the world, and sin of every shape and degree, are against His will; and anything that is against the will and commandments of God, and is preferred to His blessed Son, becomes a Barabbas.

You may bear the name of Christ, and profess the faith of Christ; you may be outwardly religious, and observe Christian forms and ordinances, and wear the livery of God's household, and in appearance range yourself on His side; but where is your *heart*, and what is your real life?

The voice and the heart do not always speak

the same thing. The voice is sometimes right, while the heart is wrong. The lips profess Christ, while the heart chooses Barabbas.

A sin indulged in secret, unknown to man, but open to the eye of God, makes the cry that goes up to Him to be "not this man, but Barabbas!" not Jesus, but this secret sin.

The love of the world is opposed to the love of God. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John ii. 15). "Ye cannot serve God, and mammon" (Matt. vi. 24). But the love of the world, in one form or another, often takes the place of the love of God, and *rules* where Christ ought to rule. Then the world becomes Barabbas—the world of pleasure, the world of gain, the world of mere worldly interests; in whatever form the world is loved more than Christ, it usurps His place, it becomes the chosen one, and the real voice of the heart is "not this man, but Barabbas."

Does this name seem a hard name to give to what seems but a slight indulgence, compared with those lengths in sin to which some go? And does it sound harsh, to call by this evil name such things as personal vanity, the love of admiration, a frivolous taste, and a life quite or almost quite devoted to amusement? "Surely, these things are not like robbery or murder! Barabbas was a robber, but *we* are not robbers."

Are you sure? Barabbas robbed men; possibly you may be robbing *God*. Are you not giving

to another the heart which is His by right? Are you not refusing to Him that first place there which belongs to Him? What means this habitual indulgence of self, this grasping covetousness, this eager pursuit of pleasure, this restless craving for fresh excitement, and withal a distaste for spiritual things, formal prayers, or prayer neglected, and the private reading of the Bible either left out of your day or felt to be a task—what means all that but a *preference*? Something else is preferred to Christ. You have a *Barabbas*; and your choice is “not this man, but Barabbas.”

“*Not* this man!” Oh, think what that means. Not Jesus, not the only Saviour, not the loving and gracious One, not the Son of God who came to redeem, not the Lord and Master and Friend, not Him who is mighty to save, not Him who loved us and gave Himself for us! Oh, what a “*Not*”! Paul gave up all, that he might *win* Christ; and will you choose, *not* to win Him, but to lose Him?

“Not this man, but Barabbas!” But what can your Barabbas do for you? Can that sweet indulgence give you peace? Can all the gold you can get, redeem your soul? Can vanity and worldly pleasure satisfy you? What can these things do for you *now*? And what *hereafter*, in a still greater need?

Let not the God of this world blind you. Awake, and Christ shall give you light! Let none persuade *you*, as the priests and elders persuaded the people.

Listen to no false leaders. They are but Satan's mouthpiece. Listen rather to Him who spake as never man spake, and who now speaks to *you*. What does He say? "Come unto Me!" "Come, take up the Cross, and follow Me!" "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." Choose *Him*; and, in choosing Him, choose *life*. Change the cry of the Jews. Let *your* cry be, "Not Barabbas, but *this Man*"—this loving Saviour, this gracious Master and Lord. Choose Him, and abide in Him; and He will abide in you, and never leave or forsake you.



THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE SHIP.

PETER was not a "lesser light"; as being an Apostle, and one of the chief of the Apostles, he was a *greater* light, "a burning and a shining light." Yet, in some of his doings, he may be considered a "lesser light"; showing us how to act in some of the minor things of life, in its every-day concerns.

Our Lord after His resurrection no longer lived with His disciples, but only showed Himself to them from time to time. In the interval between His resurrection and ascension, the disciples do not seem to have gone back habitually to their old employments, for the fishermen had become "fishers of *men*"; yet on one occasion we find them engaged in the old way. But Peter proposed it, as if it were no longer an every-day thing. There were seven of them together one evening, John himself (who tells the tale) among them, when Peter said, "I go a fishing." The rest agreed to go too. "But that night they caught nothing" (John xxi).

When morning came—the first dim dawn of day—Jesus stood on the shore ; but they, though they saw Him, did not know Him. When, in answer to His question, they told Him they had nothing, He said, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.” And so it was. When they had done as He told them, the net was so full of fish that they could not draw it in.

Then Peter knew who it was that stood on the shore. He remembered that other time when they had “toiled all the night, and taken nothing,” but let down the net at Jesus’ command, and “inclosed a great multitude of fishes,” so that “their net brake” (Luke v). Peter remembered that miracle, and the effect it had on him at the time, and knew that it was the same Lord who now worked a like wonder. But John himself knew Him first (*love* is always the first to know Him), and said to Peter, “It is the Lord !” Then, as on the other occasion, Peter was all eagerness to go to his Lord.

But it is not Peter’s eagerness that we have to do with now, but the instant and exact following of the Lord’s direction by him and the rest. They had not taken one fish all the night, and, for ought we know, the boat was still in the same place ; yet when Jesus told them to make a cast on the right side, they did so at once.

Why should they now make a haul on the right side of the boat, when all night long they had shifted from one side to the other, and caught nothing ? And why was the right side more likely

than the left? It was but the width of the boat that was between; was not one side as good as the other? So Peter might have objected; and meanwhile the shoal might have passed away: but he did not reason at all, and made no objection and no delay; they did as they were told. "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." They did cast on the right side, and they did find; and such a net-full as was beyond all their hopes.

Peter and the rest were thenceforth to be fishers of *men*; they were to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature": but always under their Lord's guidance, going where He sent them, and preaching where He from time to time should appoint them to preach. Did they not often think of "the right side of the ship," and the great haul of fishes? Did not this simple thing keep them firm in following their Master's orders? "The *right* side of the ship" was the side on which they caught, because it was the side on which they were told to cast; this particular country or city is that in which they may look for success, because it is thither that the Lord (in one way or another) shows it to be His will that they should go. On the *left* side of the ship they would have caught nothing, the morning would have been as unsuccessful as the night: a plan formed (even in God's work) without His guidance, or against the indications of His will, is likely to bring no better success.

It is this that makes *prayer* so important a part

in all missionary work ; and happily our missionary work *is* done in a spirit of prayer. A true missionary seeks direction daily as to how to employ his day, and whither to bend his steps. A missionary committee takes no forward step, and enters on no new field, without prayer for direction. They who thus work for God must be ready to recognize *closed* doors, as well as to perceive open ones, lest they should cast on the *left* side of the ship.

Paul was not there that day, he was no Apostle yet ; but this was his principle of action—an implicit following of his Master's orders. He meant to go into Bithynia, but that would have been the *left* side of the ship ; instead, he was told to pass by Mysia, and go to Troas ; that was the *right* side. And thus he inclosed a great multitude of fishes ; for thus it was that the Gospel was introduced into Europe, and converts were made and churches founded at Philippi and Thessalonica and Corinth, and that great spread of the Gospel which has since taken place in all Europe was begun. Truly Paul cast "on the right side of the ship," as he was told ; and truly did he *find*.

But human nature is proud, and loves its own way, and to be independent, and to lead. If God points to the right side, perverse man will sometimes, on that very account, prefer the left. Let us beware of leaning on our own understanding, instead of trusting in the Lord with all our heart, and obeying His orders. Not only in missionary

and other such work, but in our daily life, in our way, in our steps, in what we do and what we turn away from, let us hear His voice, and at His bidding cast on the *right* side of the ship.

Have you been unsuccessful hitherto? Have your plans failed? Have you "toiled all the night, and taken nothing"? Do not despair. Make another cast. But this time in a new spirit. Perhaps you acted before on your own judgement; seek now direction from above. Perhaps you thought *you* could do that work; ask now that God will show you how to do it, and give you His help. I am not blaming Peter; he said nothing wrong; yet say no longer "I go a fishing," but rather, "At Thy word I will let down the net."

But, with the best intentions, how are we to hear our Lord's directing voice? We shall see no form by the sea-side, we shall hear no voice speaking to us: how are we to know? We have His Word, which teaches us the general principles on which we are to act, and even they will often be enough to show us on which side to cast; we have His Spirit, to apply the Word, and to guide our will and judgement; we have His Providential dealings, by which He often shows us His will, closing one door and opening another. I do not think the sincere seeker after the will of God will be left in darkness. "If any man *will* do [wishes to do] His will, he shall know" (John vii. 17). And if our Lord says "He shall know," He will be at no loss for a way to make us know.

Proverbs are by no means always good guides. An old proverb says, "Most haste, worst speed." But there are cases in which there ought to be haste; this is one. When the Lord bade them cast on the right side, that moment they ~~made~~ ready, and let down the net; when the guidance is clear, and the opportunity has come, let there be no delay. The shoal of fishes might quickly have passed; our opportunity may soon be gone. Let us be prompt, when our Lord speaks. And the step which it is clearly His will that we should take, let us take at once.



RHODA.

(ACTS XII. 12-17.)

SHE was but a damsel, a girl; perhaps a servant-girl. But her name is mentioned in Scripture. Let us not think her beneath our notice. A servant-girl may teach us.

But she may not have been a servant. We do not know that the mother of John Mark was in a position to keep a servant. She was perhaps one of the family, or merely one of the company gathered together in prayer. For that Rhoda was a disciple is plain.

It was night. Nevertheless there were watchers in that house. "Many were gathered together praying," probably in an upper room; and Rhoda was among them. It was a sad and solemn time. The very next day Peter, they knew, was to be led out to death; they were praying for him and for themselves; for him, that he might be kept con-

stant and faithful, and be supported in his last hour; for themselves, that the hand of the tyrant might be restrained. There were tears mixed with their prayers—tears and trembling.

Suddenly there was a knocking at "the door of the gate," the outer door that opened from the street into the vestibule of the house. We can fancy how the sound startled them in the dead of night! Rhoda was sent to listen; or perhaps went of her own accord. It may be that, as the youngest, she was sent. Or perhaps she went in the eager readiness of youth. While the rest held their breath, and looked at each other in alarm, she arose and went down to listen at the door.

Peter spoke, and Rhoda knew his voice. Often had she heard it in preaching and prayer. She thought he was fast in prison, and now she heard his voice. Only a plank was between her and him. We need not debate why she did not open to him; we are told plainly, "she opened not the gate *for gladness*." She was so astonished, and so overpowered with joy, that she must instantly tell the news upstairs (if upstairs it was). So, leaving Peter standing outside, she "ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate!"

But they did not believe her. Though they were in the act of praying for him, yet the very last thing they thought of was that God had answered their prayers. "Thou art *mad*," was their first word. But when she maintained that Peter was there, and they saw that she was in her senses,

they said, "It is his *angel!*"—meaning probably his guardian-angel, according to the belief prevailing among the Jews. For it was the superstitious idea of some that a person's guardian-angel did in some cases appear to give warning of his approaching death: possibly they had this thought when they said "It is his angel!"

We are not told what Rhoda said to this; we may conclude that she stuck to her opinion, and still maintained that it was Peter himself. While they were debating, the knocking went on, and at length the door was opened, and there stood Peter. Rhoda was in the right; it was Peter himself.

From the moment that she heard Peter's voice she had never doubted. The evidence of her senses was enough for her. The others might be older and more experienced, but all they said weighed nothing with her against this evidence. She had heard Peter's voice; she knew it was he. It may be that from within she asked who it was that knocked, and that in reply he called her by her name.

We are reminded of a greater than Peter being known by calling a woman by her name. Rhoda could not see Peter, but Mary actually saw Jesus; yet she did not recognize Him till He called her by her name, "Mary!" (John xx. 16.)

Rhoda's plain common-sense made her hold to her belief. But was there nothing in her besides? She was "a damsel," a girl, the nearest in age perhaps to a child of all present. Perhaps she had

more of a childlike faith. It may be that, while prayer was made for Peter, this girl prayed with a simpler faith than the rest, and believed that God would hear and answer. She was astonished at hearing Peter's voice ; but she did not doubt that it was his voice. They had been praying, and God had answered their prayer : this may have been her simple thought.

We may often learn from the young in the matter of prayer and faith. A child's faith is simple and undoubting ; we must become as little children, in order to enter into the kingdom of God : and the faith of a young person, beyond childhood, is often more simple and clear than that of older people. It ought not to be so. As we grow in years, so ought we to grow in faith, because we have had experience of God's faithfulness. So ought it to be ; and so it is in many cases. But not in all. Some Christians lose their simplicity of faith, and learn to calculate and so to doubt. With them experience, instead of strengthening faith, makes them slow to believe ; so that while they pray in all need and difficulty, and mean to pray in faith, yet faith is often wanting with regard both to expecting and to receiving God's answers to prayer. "Many were gathered together praying," and among them some much older than Rhoda both in years and in the faith, yet she believed while they believed not. True, she alone had heard the voice ; but the words of our Lord to Thomas apply to hearing as well as seeing, "Blessed are they

that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29).

We can forgive Rhoda for keeping Peter waiting at the door. She was so glad, that her presence of mind failed her. She believed, and was overjoyed. Mistakes may readily be pardoned, if there be faith, and love, and joy for a right cause, as here, where she was glad for no selfish reason, but for the answer to prayer and for Peter's safety. But no harm came. Soon the door was opened, and Peter was safe within, and all now believed, and all were glad.

We also make mistakes, and sometimes in an emergency lose our presence of mind; but, for those who have faith and love, mistakes will be overruled, and ill consequences turned away. A sudden joy, as well as a sudden grief, may for a moment upset the judgement; but He to whom nothing can come as a surprise will turn all to good for those who trust in Him.

When the door closed again on Peter and Rhoda and the rest, and all listened to Peter's wondrous tale, the door closed also on Rhoda's history. We never hear of her again. This little light just appeared, but was almost instantly withdrawn. But a light it was, however small. She heard Peter's voice, and believed, and was glad. Let us remember the words of our Lord, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John x. 27). Let us hear His voice when He speaks to us, and know it from all besides. Let us

hear, and follow. And when He comes and stands at the door and knocks—the door of our hearts—let us open to Him immediately; then He will come in to us, and Rhoda's gladness for Peter was nothing to that which our Lord's own presence will bring to us.



JOHN MARK.

IT may be taken as certain that John Mark was the same person as Mark the Evangelist. He is variously called "John, whose surname was Mark" (Acts xii. 12 ; xv. 37) ; simply "John" (xiii. 5, 13) ; and "Mark" (xv. 39, and also in several of St. Paul's Epistles).

He was nephew to Barnabas, being his sister's son (Col. iv. 10), and his mother's name was Mary (Acts xii. 12). We read of him in connexion with Paul and Barnabas, as returning with them from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts xii. 25) ; but before that he had been converted by means of Peter, and probably at Jerusalem, where his mother lived ; for St. Peter calls him "Marcus my son" (1 Pet. v. 13), just as St. Paul addressed Timothy (and Titus also) as "my own son in the faith" (1 Tim. i. 2).

Not only so, but, as Timothy and Titus were frequent companions of Paul in his missionary journeys, so was Mark much with Peter. It was

held in the early Church that his Gospel was mainly written from information given him by Peter, much of it being taken down from Peter's lips; so that, though Mark himself was not an Apostle, nor perhaps a personal companion of our Lord, yet his Gospel is derived from one who was both.

The first mention of John Mark is in connexion with his mother and her house and with Peter. When Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, he went to "the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying" (Acts xii. 12). It is not too much to suppose that John Mark himself was among them, and that he was present when Peter appeared, and gave the account of his deliverance. Was it then, or before, that he had been converted by Peter's means? Probably before. We may believe that he was praying with the rest on behalf of him who was his spiritual father. If so, we may be sure that the appearance of Peter at the very moment of their prayer for him impressed the young convert greatly, and deepened in him the work of grace. It is not without meaning that his name is mentioned: we may believe that he was there among the many; and it is interesting to find his name connected thus early with that of Peter.

But John Mark, though an inspired man, was not an Apostle, and had not received his commission directly from the Lord; and this makes it allowable to class him as a "lesser light," as compared with

Matthew and John and Peter. He was a true light, but, personally and by comparison, a lesser light. What he *wrote* however, being by inspiration, is of equal authority with the other Gospels.

Having been converted at Jerusalem by means of Peter some time before, he was found there by Paul and Barnabas when they went thither from Antioch with the gifts of that Church. How long they stayed there, we do not know ; but it was long enough for them both to become acquainted with John Mark (Barnabas, however, must have known him before) as a promising young disciple ; so that, on their return to Antioch, they took him with them as a helper. Barnabas, his uncle, was influenced perhaps by family affection, but Paul thought well of him too. So well that when, some time after, Paul and Barnabas went forth on their missionary journey, they took him with them as their "minister," or attendant (xiii. 5).

John Mark, we may imagine, set out full of zeal. He was young, and the work was new and interesting ; and it was no small honour to be chosen to accompany such men. He sailed with them to Cyprus, and was present at all that took place in that island. He took some part (though perhaps a humble one) in the preaching at Salamis, and saw the punishment inflicted on the sorcerer at Paphos, and was a witness of the effect produced on the mind of the deputy, or governor. But now his heart failed him. He embarked with them, it appears, and arrived with them at Perga,

but that was to him the end of the expedition. At Perga he left them, and returned to Jerusalem.

Cyprus was an island, and there the work, with its difficulties and dangers, was comparatively limited, though even there opposition was met with; but at Perga they came to the mainland of Asia Minor, and before them lay a whole continent of heathenism. Pamphylia, the country in which they landed, was a wild and savage district, and between the coast and the table-land of the interior a mountain region had to be crossed, not unlikely to harbour robbers, and sure to be rough and difficult. Probably John did not know much of this till he actually landed in the country. Then his heart failed him. He could not face these hardships and perils—"perils of robbers" among them; so, finding (we may suppose) at Perga a ship sailing homewards, he took passage in her, and gave up the work. He had put his hand to the plough, but looked back.

Fear is more likely to have been his reason than pride or ambition. It is not to be thought that he disliked the place of *minister*, or attendant, and wished for a higher post. True, he gained a step when afterwards he joined Barnabas; but it is more likely that the fear of hardship and danger was now his motive. He was young, and afterwards did good service; but at this point he failed. With what feelings he, in after life, looked back on his conduct we have no means of knowing; but if

he was ashamed of having once gone back, he was doubly thankful for being restored and employed again. If the thought of his fault humbled him, it made him all the more useful. And his fault and recovery together give encouragement to those who have at any time shrunk from enduring hardness as Christ's soldiers. All is not lost; they may yet be restored, and again received into service.

Paul and Barnabas went on without him. But several years later—as many as six or eight perhaps—this conduct of John Mark became the cause of the separation of these fellow-workers, and of a breach (for a time at least) in their friendship. Barnabas wished to take his nephew with them on a second missionary expedition; but Paul objected, thinking it “not good, to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work” (Acts xv. 38). The contention was sharp, but nevertheless a friendly division of work seems to have been made: Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia and Asia Minor; while “Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.” Of what they did there we have no record. The sacred history follows Paul and Silas.

And in this, as well as in the fact that Paul and Silas were “recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God,” we seem to see which of the two friends was in the right in this dispute. Barnabas was moved by private affection, Paul thought only of fitness for the work.

What further we know of Mark is gathered from the writings of St. Paul and St. Peter, both of whom mention him: St. Peter once, St. Paul three times. The first mention of him in point of time is probably that made by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians, and about the same time in his letter to Philemon. Ten or eleven years have passed since Paul and Barnabas parted company, and Mark went with Barnabas to Cyprus. Where Mark has been in the interval we are nowhere told; we can only gather from what we know of him before and after.

We left him going on missionary work to Cyprus, where Paul and Barnabas had first preached the Gospel, with him as their attendant. Going now with his uncle alone, he went more as an equal; not so much now an attendant as a brother-missionary. There is no reason to suppose that he did not do true missionary work in that island, and elsewhere also; for we need not think that the journey ended at Cyprus.

But now, ten or eleven years later, we find him with Paul at Rome. Then Paul and he have come together again? Yes, and more than that. It appears that, either voluntarily or not, he is sharing Paul's captivity; for thus Paul writes, "Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, touching whom [that is, Mark] ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him" (Col. iv. 10). Are we not to understand that, in some sort, Marcus was Paul's

fellow-prisoner as well as Aristarchus? And if a prisoner, it was for the Gospel's sake. He does not therefore *now* shrink from hardship.

But this appears further. He has been for some time associated with Paul, for already Paul has sent messages about him to the Colossians—"commandments," injunctions, as to how they were to trust him; and now again St. Paul writes, "If he come unto you, receive him." I am thinking of sending him to you on the work of the Gospel: if I do so, receive him as my friend and fellow-worker.

But he does not send him immediately; he is not the bearer of the Epistle. At the same time with the Epistle to the Church, Paul writes a letter to Philemon, a member of it, and, in the greetings at the end of that letter, he writes, "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; *Marcus*, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers" (Philem. 23, 24).

It is plain that, as Barnabas and Paul were friends again (see 1 Cor. ix. 6), so Mark also was now a faithful friend and helper of Paul; keeping company with him in his imprisonment, and probably in some way sharing in it, and employed by Paul on a mission to a distant church. Mark is a true missionary now. At the outset his spirit failed him; but now he is a good soldier, and owned as such by the first and leading soldier in that army, the same who, in very faithfulness, once doubted and rejected him.

But though thus mentioned by him, we are not to suppose that Mark was a constant helper of St. Paul, as Timothy and Titus were¹. *They* were Paul's sons in the faith; Mark had another spiritual father, Peter. Now, though the history of the Acts of the Apostles, which begins with Peter and his work, soon leaves Peter to take up the life and labours of Paul, yet we are not to think that Peter left off his missionary work at the point where the story of it ceases. While Paul was carrying on the work of the Gospel in some countries, Peter and the rest of the Apostles were engaged in it in others. Paul might labour "more abundantly than they all," yet labour they did. And there is every reason to believe that Mark was to Peter what Timothy was to Paul—a loving disciple, a constant companion and fellow-missionary, labouring with him in the Gospel, "as a son with his father."

In the years that passed between Paul's rejection of Mark and their coming together again, there was time for much companionship with Peter, and it was probably in that interval that they were so much together, the younger learning from the elder. Only once, however, do we find a trace of this in Scripture. It is in St. Peter's first Epistle: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son" (1 Pet. v. 13).

¹ See *Lesser Lights*, second series, pp. 260, 288.

I do not debate the question whether Babylon here means Babylon. I take it for granted that it does. There seems not the slightest reason against taking the word literally. The Apostles were to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature"; why should so important a place as Babylon be left out? And who so fit to go to that great city, with so many Jews in it, as Peter, "the Apostle of the circumcision"? St. Peter therefore wrote from Babylon, and Mark was there with him; and, though they may often have gone from place to place in company, yet they were probably stationary together at Babylon for a considerable time in the course of those years of which we have no account, and it was there that Peter told much to Mark.

Thus we find Mark at one time with Paul at Rome, at another with Peter at Babylon; and the space between the two times is not great. We cannot decide the question, which was first. Some think that Mark did not join Peter till after the death of Paul; but the better opinion seems to be that he was with Peter at Babylon after Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, at the time when Paul himself was on his travels again.

Once more we find him mentioned by St. Paul. In his second Epistle to Timothy, written from Rome during his second imprisonment there, and the last he ever wrote, we find this: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. iv. 11). Was Mark

then at Ephesus? So it seems; for Timothy was there. But possibly he was at Colossae (not far off), to which place he had been recommended. And was this before or after he was with Peter at Babylon? And where now was Peter? These are questions that cannot be answered with certainty. There was no very long interval between St. Peter's first Epistle and St. Paul's second to Timothy; but most likely that to Timothy was the last of the two. Paul wished for Mark at Rome: whether he went there, we do not know; or whether even Timothy did. But the wish shows his complete restoration to Paul's good opinion. Paul knew his end was near; and Mark's presence was desired, as well as that of the beloved Timothy. And not for pleasure only, that their leader might have them with him at the last, but also for the good of the ministry. Paul had found Mark useful, and now he would leave him in joint charge with Timothy. With his end full in view, this was his wish.

With regard to the connexion of St. Peter with the Gospel of St. Mark, while there is little doubt that Mark's knowledge of facts was derived from Peter, yet the Gospel is his, not Peter's, and Mark wrote by inspiration. But surely tradition, when consistent and well-established, has, with regard to *facts*, almost the weight of *history*; and such tradition we have here. It was the prevalent belief in the early Church that Mark was informed by Peter; and early Christian writers of high

authority take that view. There is no reason to doubt its correctness. And the view is strengthened by what we find in the Gospel itself. There are some things which no other of the Evangelists relates so circumstantially as Mark—even to the very *look* of our blessed Lord. Mark himself was not present, but he writes as any other than an eye-witness could hardly write; an eye-witness—and one of keen observation and deep feeling and retentive memory—had informed him, and that eye-witness was *Peter*.

It is a fact full of interest, and of encouragement as well, that one whose early ministry was clouded by a fault should thus have been completely restored, and have become the valued helper of two Apostles, and the inspired author of one of the four stories of our Lord's life and death and resurrection. We may wonder at his turning back, if indeed he had been present when Peter told of his marvellous deliverance from prison; for could not He who sent an angel to rescue Peter carry Mark through all the dangers of Lycaonia? But let us rather adore the grace by which he who did at one time look back was nevertheless fitted for the kingdom of heaven, and made an instrument for spreading the Gospel on earth. No human instrument is perfect; Mark went back, Peter denied, even Paul once contended too hotly; the best are but "earthen vessels": but God can be magnified even in the imperfections of His servants, and surely nothing magnifies more His power and His

grace than when "the excellency of the power" prevails in spite of the worthlessness of the instrument, and even an imperfect and backsliding servant is lifted up, and brought back, and forgiven, and blest, and honoured. Whatever view we take of John Mark himself, let us "glorify God in him."



APOLLOS.

WHAT we know of Apollos concerns rather his gifts, and his ministry, and influence, than his personal character. We are left to gather that.

He appears at Corinth as the rival of St. Paul ; but it does not appear that this was by any fault of his. The party-spirited Corinthians were greatly in fault, but there is nothing to show that Apollos was in fault at all. As he was certainly regarded by Paul not as a rival or opposer, but as a fellow-worker, so let *us* regard him. In treating of such Scripture characters as are not plainly condemned, it is right as well as wise to take a favourable view. Even in doubtful cases, who are we, that we should be their judges ?

The first thing we read of Apollos is his coming to Ephesus during St. Paul's absence (Acts xviii. 24-28). He was a Jew by birth, a native of Alexandria, then a chief seat of learning, noted for

its library and for the number of Jews residing there. It is said of him that he was "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures"—that is, both in his knowledge of them and in his power of expounding them. These were the *Old Testament* Scriptures only. He was a disciple of John the Baptist (how he had become so, we know not), and knew all that John taught, but no more. He knew therefore that Jesus was the Messiah; but the teaching of Jesus himself, and the great facts of His life, and His death and resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit—of these he had not a full knowledge, if he had any. Yet he "was instructed in the way of the Lord; and, being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord," though "knowing only the baptism of John."

We can well believe that when this man, learned in the Scriptures, able and eloquent and earnest, "began to speak in the synagogue," he drew great attention, and made no slight impression. This was at *Ephesus*, where the synagogue was large, and the congregation numerous.

Among his hearers were Aquila and Priscilla, of whom we read before, in the opening of the same chapter (Acts xxiii. 1-3), as being with St. Paul at Corinth, and then as going with him as far as Ephesus, and being left there by him while he travelled further (xxiii. 18, 19)¹. This husband and wife, friends and companions of Paul, being more

¹ See "Aquila and Priscilla"; *Lesser Lights*, second series, p. 338.

fully taught in the Gospel than Apollos, from being his hearers became his teachers. Struck with his learning and eloquence and zeal, and desirous that such gifts should be turned wholly to the service of the Gospel, they "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly"—more exactly and fully.

This speaks well for both parties. It speaks well for *Apollos*. It is not every gifted and eloquent preacher, listened to, admired and followed, who will submit to become the pupil of his pupils, and to be told "You know part, but you do not yet know all." But Apollos stood this test; he let himself be taught. And all his learning and eloquence and zeal were less to his praise than was his humility.

We know not how long he continued at Ephesus; but, for one of his powers and energy, even Ephesus was too narrow a sphere. He would go further. He would cross the sea, and preach in Europe; he "would pass into Achaia," and visit the great city of Corinth. There is not the least ground for imputing to him any motive of selfish ambition; he went, not for his own glory, but for his Master's. The brethren at Ephesus certainly took that view, for they "wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him." So to Corinth he went. Paul was not there then; he had left it, and was far away on his tour through Galatia and Phrygia (xxiii. 22, 23).

At Corinth Apollos found the Church which St. Paul had founded. The disciples received him

as requested by those of Ephesus; and there he "helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." As a disciple of John the Baptist, he had known this; but now, as taught by Priscilla and Aquila, he knew it more exactly and deeply, and much besides. His great knowledge of the Old Testament was brought to bear on this point; he convinced the Jews out of their own Scriptures; and thus he was a mighty helper in the work of the Gospel at Corinth, comforting the Christians, convincing the Jews, extending the Church.

But was the great enemy idle? He never is, when the Gospel is prospering anywhere; while Apollos laboured thus, Satan was at work too. What did he do?

He tried to split the Church at Corinth into parties; to puff up the Christians there in favour of one teacher against another; to lead them to be followers of men rather than of Christ; to sow among them the seeds of party-spirit, jealousy, and ill-will. This would spoil their simplicity towards Christ, lower their tone, and stop their growth and the spread of the Gospel in the place.

Too well did the enemy succeed. Some were for *Paul*: "I am of Paul!" they cried. But the Apostle Paul rebuked all alike. Those who cried out for him were as sternly dealt with as the others, who said, "I am of Apollos!" He neither wanted adherents for himself, nor would he that they

should take Apollos as their leader ; he would have all follow Christ. They were still, he tells them, but "babes in Christ," and must be fed with milk—taught still the very first principles of the Gospel—instead of receiving stronger food, such teaching as was fit for grown-up Christians. Their party-spirit showed how backward they were ; they were but beginners still, and not beginning well. They were carnal, not spiritual.

How indignantly he writes ! "Who then is *Paul*, and who is *Apollos*, but ministers (*servants*) by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ? I have planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth ; but God, that giveth the increase."

Paul, who had planted the Gospel at Corinth, was quite willing to be nothing ; was Apollos, who came after him and watered the plant, equally willing to be nothing ? Paul sought not his own glory, and indignantly refused to be the head of a party ; was Apollos of the same mind ? I find no ground for supposing the contrary. Paul sternly reproves the Corinthians, but he does not include Apollos in his reproof. It may be that, when some cried, "I am of Apollos !" he disclaimed all such leadership as firmly as Paul did, when others said, "I am of Paul !"

If we cannot be so absolutely sure as in the case of Paul, at least let us hope that so it was. In all probability, Apollos was the more attractive

preacher of the two. Some of the Corinthians, we know, thought Paul's "bodily frame weak, and his speech contemptible"; Apollos, on the contrary, was "an eloquent man," and probably of a commanding presence. He was a good man and true; and even if he did not entirely escape the snare of popularity, let us remember that it is not every good and able man that is a Paul. And though St. Paul writes, "Now he that planteth (meaning *himself*) and he that watereth (meaning *Apollos*) are *one*," yet he means, not necessarily that they were entirely one in every thought and feeling, but that they were one in this *work*, each being engaged in a different department of one and the same ministry.

It is possible that among the *builders* referred to in the verses that follow (1 Cor. iii. 10-15) Apollos is included. Paul himself, he says, "as a wise master-builder or architect," had laid the foundation in Christ, and another (for instance, Apollos) had followed and built thereupon; "but," says he, "let every man (Apollos and all other builders) take heed *how* he buildeth thereupon." There was but one foundation, Christ himself, and upon that foundation Apollos, as well as Paul, had built and was building; but let him build *wisely* and *well*, let him not mix any lower principle or motive with the simple preaching of Christ, let him take care to build up all converts in *Him*, lest among them there should prove to be worthless ones—"wood, hay, stubble"—as well as true and precious ones—

"gold, silver, precious stones." Let Apollos and the rest look well to this. Otherwise, though they themselves (as true believers) might be saved, some of their work might perish, and so they might suffer loss of the promised reward,

This however, is at most a warning, not a reproof. The Apostle points out a danger and snare; he does not say that Apollos has fallen into it.

There is a verse in the next chapter (iv. 7), which, if it be applied to Apollos, does seem to go further. St. Paul there says expressly that he is writing about himself and Apollos (iv. 6), when he warns the Corinthians "not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another"; then suddenly he changes from the plural to the singular, as if now addressing *one* person only. "For who," asks he, as if now turning to this one alone, "who maketh *thee* to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not *receive*? now if thou didst *receive* it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst *not* received it?" Then he resumes the plural number, and goes on, "Now *ye* are full, now *ye* are rich." Thus the seventh verse is a parenthesis, in which he turns for a moment from addressing *all* to address *one*. The question is, who is this one? Is it Apollos?

Were it not for one circumstance, we should be inclined to say Yes; but that circumstance seems fatal to the idea. Apollos (as we shall see presently) was not at the time at Corinth; wherever St. Paul was when he wrote the letter, Apollos was with

him. Now, the address in the seventh verse is to some one who was then at Corinth, and who would be present when the letter was read—as Euodia and Syntyche were when Paul's letter to the Philippians was read (Phil. iv. 2)¹. But as Apollos could not be present, and was not even at Corinth, it was not to him, but to some other teacher, that the address was made. It cannot be that Paul would address one as at Corinth who was sitting by his side when he wrote.

If therefore he meant in that verse to charge any one with boastfulness, it was not Apollos. Whether or not he was at all lifted up by his gifts and his popularity, there is no proof of it in that verse; it does not refer to him.

But oh! the harm that is done by their admirers to highly gifted, able, eloquent ministers! If Apollos was not in fault, his hearers were; if his simplicity towards Christ was not corrupted, no thanks to those who had done so much to spoil it! Little do those who run after a gifted preacher and praise him to the skies, and that even to his face—little do they think what a snare they lay for him, and how they may help to turn from their right use the very talents they admire, and rob their favourite of his reward.

“Ah, spare your idol! think him human still.
Charms he may have, but he has frailties too.
Dote not too much, nor spoil what ye admire².”

¹ See “Euodia and Syntyche”; *Lesser Lights*, second series, p. 375.

² Cowper's Task, Book II.

Such are flatterers, not friends. Their favour is a cruel kindness. Grace may enable their favourite to resist and overcome; but such are no helpers, but hinderers. The work they are doing in their foolish praise and adulation is the *enemy's* work, who will gain a great victory if once he can make the servant of Christ vain and self-seeking.

There is, I repeat, no reason to suppose that Apollos became so. But all ministers, and all besides who are called to use their gifts in public, must be on their guard against self-esteem and vainglory. Their powers, whatever they may be, are talents entrusted to them by their Lord, to be used for Him alone. Nor, with all their power, can they do the least real service without His grace and blessing. They may draw crowds, but they cannot touch one conscience; they may be listened to with breathless attention, but not one heart can they win to God. Paul himself might be the planter, and the highly-gifted Apollos the waterer; but God alone could give the increase. Let preachers and hearers never forget this. "Let no man glory in men."

Towards the close of the Epistle, Apollos is mentioned in a way that clearly shows him not to have been then at Corinth. Timothy, with others, was the bearer of the letter; Apollos was with Paul, and had been desired by him to go too, but for some reason he was unwilling to go at that time. "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren;

but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time" (1 Cor. xvi. 12). This "convenient" has no reference to his own comfort; it means "seasonable"; to Apollos, for some reason, that time seemed unseasonable.

Why, we are not told. It may be that it was for the very reason that party-spirit was so high, and his presence might foster it. Possibly he felt his popularity there to be dangerous to himself, and would not expose himself to the danger. There was no quarrel between him and Paul, only a difference of opinion on a question of time. "*Our brother Apollos*" shows on what terms they were; not rivals, heads of opposing parties, but fellow-workers, friends, brothers. But this eloquent and learned man, a powerful preacher, a zealous missionary, a man of influence, had a will of his own. It would have been unnatural, if such a man had been without a certain independence of character. It was of his own will that he originally went to Corinth; it was in the exercise of his own judgement that he would not go now. St. Paul, his superior, does not blame him; when Apollos thinks the right time to have arrived, then, says he, he will come.

Once more we find Paul making mention of Apollos. It is in his Epistle to Titus, written near the close of his life, between his first and second imprisonment, about ten years later than the Epistle to the Corinthians. "Bring Zenas the lawyer, and

Apollos, on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them" (Titus iii. 13). Send them forward on their way, and supply them with what they want: it is the very same charge as that which he gave to these same Corinthians about Timothy (1 Cor. xvi. 11).

Apollos therefore, like Timothy, was a beloved brother and fellow-worker of Paul. The Apostle wished for his presence, and cared for his comfort. Perhaps both were with him at the last. God's servants have various gifts and characters; but, if they are His servants indeed, all their gifts are devoted to their Master's service, and all are turned to account by Him. Timothy was young, gentle, and retiring, as a son to Paul; Apollos was bold, eager, eloquent, energetic, less like a son to Paul than a younger brother. But, in his own heart and feeling, he was no more a rival or opposer than the beloved Timothy. Each was a chosen instrument, but each in his own way. Paul himself was the spiritual father of the Corinthians, *he* had begotten them through the Gospel; and of this, Timothy would remind them (1 Cor. iv. 15); but he felt no jealousy of those who carried on the work which he had begun; rather he rejoiced that they had other "instructors in Christ," some to water where he had planted, while God alone gave the increase.

Such was the mind of Paul, and such (we may well believe) the mind of Apollos. Let it be *ours* too. To God be all the glory of all gifts and all success!



URBANE.

WE generally write the name *Urban*. It means town-bred, *city-like*, and courteous, as opposed to the plainness and roughness of country-bred people. We speak of a person as *urbane*, when we would describe him as courteous and polite.

There is no reason however to suppose that the Urbane of Scripture was so called because of his being town-bred. In his case it was probably a mere name. It is a name of honour in the Bible; but some who have borne it since have done it no honour. There have been several *popes* of this name; some of them, it is to be feared, of a very different character from Urbane, the friend of St. Paul.

We read of him but once. His name occurs in the list of Paul's friends, helpers, and work-fellows, in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Urbane was at Rome, either as a resident or

a visitor ; and St. Paul sends him this greeting, " Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ " (xvi. 9).

" Our helper," or, more literally, our fellow-worker. *Our* : does that mean *my* ? Or has it a wider meaning, and does it include St. Paul and all his fellow-Christians ? For we are all in one service, working together for one Master. And none recognized this more than Paul.

But perhaps Urbane had personally worked with him in the Gospel in some place. If so, we do not know where or when. But Paul never forgot or overlooked any fellow-worker. It may have been long ago, but the working together was not forgotten. If Paul did not forget, still less does God forget. Any true service we do to Him, at any time and in any place, is graciously remembered. It may have been a humble service, as the helping, or ministering to, some eminent servant of God, in a very small way ; yet our gracious Master accepts and records it.

But more likely Urbane had not personally worked anywhere with St. Paul, but was his fellow-worker as being engaged in the same service elsewhere, he serving in the Gospel at Rome, while Paul did so in other places. Paul may never have seen him ; but his work made him a friend.

We may call him a *humble* friend. For while all the world, so far as the Gospel has reached, know of Paul, Urbane is little known ; and while the Apostle's journeys and labours are fully related, who knows what Urbane did ?

There are many such workers ; doing a real work, yet unknown to men, though well known to God. The humblest of them is a fellow-worker with the highest. Is not the general in the same service as the private ? Is not the scullion in a great house a fellow-worker with the housekeeper and the steward ? It is the service that unites them, though one may fill a lower place than another, and be employed in inferior work—seemingly, at least.

“Our helper *in Christ*.” This was how Urbane was regarded by Paul. Paul himself was a servant of Christ ; Urbane was one too. Paul was engaged in making known the Gospel of Christ ; Urbane, in some way, was doing the same. The work and the Master made them one.

You, who are doing a small and humble work, are a workmate with those who are doing the greatest and highest. Nay more, with those great servants who served the Lord ages ago. You are a workmate with Paul himself. Few see your work. You are not noticed on the way to your Sunday class, or as you go from house to house in your district ; your missionary collecting-card is known only to those whom you ask to give ; your visit of sympathy to a sick neighbour, and the night you spend watching by the bedside—oh, these are not the things that win fame ! Yet they are things that are far more worthy than many things that do. There is an eye that sees you, and loves to see you ; there is a judgement that rates your life and what

you do far higher than much that wins a great name in the world ; there is One, the Lord of all, who counts you among His servants, and a fellow-servant of the highest He has.

“Urbane, our helper in Christ.” It is a high title, both for the partnership and for the Master ; the partnership with Paul, and the having the Lord himself as Master. What are you and I, that we should be employed in such a service ? If God honours us so, let us love our Master and our work, and be diligent in what our hand finds to do.

Are you town-bred, or country-bred ? Are you of gentle birth, or humble ? If only your heart be given to God, He has work for you. Urbane *may* have been only a name, and probably was ; but if Urbane, living at Rome, the metropolis of the world, was of courtly and polished character, then doubtless God had work for him to do in that great city, suited to his station and character. So has He still for such. Those of high birth and breeding may serve Christ among their equals, and turn their intercourse with them to good account. Oh, if you be indeed *urbane*, courtly, polished, and refined, look upon that very circumstance as a *talent*, and use it for your Master.

But are you country-bred, or low in station—whether in town or country—Christ has work for you also. There are many such around you, many like yourself. For that very reason, you are specially called to serve your Master among them ; for you have, by God’s providence, a special fitness for it.

One has one sphere, and another has another ; look at *your* sphere, and consider that God himself appointed it for you, and that it is in that particular sphere that you are to serve Him.

Take a hint from the name itself ; be *urbane*, courteous and kind. In all you try to do for your Master, show yourself such. He himself was always kind. The gracious things which He did, He did graciously ; no kindness of His was spoilt by an unkind tone or manner. "Be pitiful, be *courteous*." If you are really pitiful, compassionate, sympathizing, let this feeling show itself in your manner, and be courteous too.

We are to be *urbane*, courteous, not only to the rich but to the poor. We are as much bound to be so to the one as to the other. Those who go much among the poor often find among them a true delicacy of feeling and manner ; they are *urbane*, though perhaps country-bred ; let all who go among them show the same. The poor are good judges ; they appreciate doubly a kindness done in a kind way ; *condescension* (what are we, that we should *condescend* ?) they do not like, but sympathy, that makes itself one with them, wins their hearts. And if it wins their hearts to the visitor and friend, it may be used by God to win their hearts to *Him*.

In such a case, the *urbane*, the kind and gentle visitor, becomes indeed a worker for Christ, and a fellow-worker with the best of His servants.



CARPUS.

THE second Epistle to Timothy was probably the last letter of the kind which St. Paul wrote. It was written from Rome during his second imprisonment, and within a few months of his death. He alludes in it to his approaching end, "I am now ready to be offered (on the point of being offered), and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. iv. 6). His tone throughout is solemn, earnest, and spiritual; he writes as one who has almost done with earth and stands on the brink of the eternal world; in that spirit he reminds Timothy of his past sufferings for Christ, and warns him against error, and as his spiritual father charges him to watch and labour and endure.

We are almost startled to find amid all this the mention of a *cloak*: "the cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee,

and the books, but especially the parchments" (iv. 13).

In going to Rome St. Paul had passed by Troas, and there for some reason he had left the cloak and the books. Either he was hurried aboard ship, or thought he should not want them, or, possibly, with his mind full of more important things, he forgot them. But now he wants them; the cloak for warmth and comfort, the books for study and ministry. He presses Timothy to join him at Rome; he wishes once more to see him face to face, and to give him his parting directions. "Do thy diligence to come before winter" (v. 21); and, as on his journey from Ephesus (where probably he was) he would pass by Troas, he begs him to bring the cloak and books which he had left there; winter was coming on, and the cloak would be wanted; for I do not doubt that the "cloke" was really a garment, and not (as some say) a travelling bag or sack.

But who was Carpus? Evidently a Christian at Troas, and a man trusted by Paul. Probably he had stayed with Carpus there; very likely Carpus had been converted by his means, and perhaps on that first visit to Troas, when the vision of the man of Macedonia appeared to him (Acts xvi); and, if so, doubtless he was present when Paul afterwards preached all night long, and Eutychus was restored to life (Acts xx).

But let us take Paul himself first. Here we find the great Apostle, his mind full of high and holy

things, yet giving thought to a cloak. It is pleasant to be able to connect such an one as Paul with so small a thing. Nor is this the only such instance: he begged this very Timothy to drink a little wine for his weakness (1 Tim. v. 23); he exhorted those in danger at sea to take food (Acts xxvii. 34). We are to "seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness"; but we are not to neglect lesser things. The things that concern comfort and health it is not wrong to attend to; nay, it would be wrong to neglect them. Paul's example teaches us that a disciple of Christ may give a thought even to a cloak.

But for *one* who gives too little thought to such things, there are a hundred who give too much. Bodily comfort comes first with many, and with great numbers dress occupies far more thought than it deserves. Clothing for warmth and comfort should fill but a small space in the thoughts; but what shall be said of clothing for *ornament*? Oh, the sums that are spent, and the thought that is bestowed, on this! "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matt. vi. 25). It was not for show, but for protection and warmth that Paul wanted his cloak; but some will sacrifice both in order to make (as they think) a better appearance; and yet, try as they may, they cannot equal a lily, or a daisy. Solomon, in his royal robes, could not; nor can they.

Paul gave thought to his cloak, but yet more to his books, especially some of them, "the parch-

ments." His leaving them seems to point to haste; he would not purposely leave them behind, and he would hardly forget them.

For what were these books, some written on paper (papyrus) and some on parchment? Probably all of them, but almost certainly those written on parchment, were portions of Holy Scripture. The sacred books were not at that time in one volume, but on different rolls. The roll, for instance, that was handed to our Lord to read from in the synagogue at Nazareth, was "the book of the prophet Esaias" (Luke iv. 17). St. Paul said, "*especially* the parchments." Why? Not because a parchment roll was in itself of more value than a paper one (he was more than a mere book-collector), but because *they*, whatever the others may have been, were almost certainly books of Scripture. He desired the cloak and the paper books, but "*especially* the parchments."

Do not care more for a cloak, or a dress, than for a book; and, among books, do not care for a novel, or a book of science or history, more than for the Book of God. "Especially the parchments" shows where Paul's preference lay: be like him, let your Bible be to you the most precious of books, the best loved and the most read.

Let us now turn to *Carpus*. When Paul left his cloak and books at Troas, he left them in charge of Carpus; "at Carpus'," it might be put, at the house probably in which Paul had lodged. Carpus means *fruit*: let us indulge in a little play upon his

name, and suppose that he was both a fruit of Paul's ministry and also a fruit-bearing Christian. Certainly Paul *trusted* him, and treated him as a friend. Paul had other friends at Troas, but Carpus was to keep the cloak and books. He would keep them safely.

It was a small service, but a service it was; and being done to Christ's servant, when engaged in His work, it was done to Christ himself. Our Master has many servants, some in high places and some in low, and He puts them to very different work. Paul was to travel from land to land proclaiming the Gospel; Carpus meanwhile was to keep Paul's cloak. If Carpus did even that small service faithfully, he was reckoned a faithful servant.

Our gracious Master judges us, not by the work He sets us to, but by the way in which we do it. If Carpus had said he would go with Paul, and bear a part in preaching, while some one else might take care of the cloak, would Carpus have done well? Not if his appointed work was to stay and keep the cloak. The best place for us is that in which our Master puts us; the most honourable work is that which He gives us to do. The man out of whom the unclean spirit had been cast might not choose his place or work; he was not to go with the Lord, but to stay at home and tell of the Lord's mercy (Mark v. 19); and so he did. Let us be content with such service as our Lord puts us to. If we are to keep a cloak, let us keep it well; if we are to be guardians of the Word of God, let us

guard it faithfully. The daughters in a family, before they leave home for outside work, should be quite sure that the Lord sends them. It may be that He does, for He sent Paul ; but it may be that their place is at home, for it was there that Carpus had to stay.

There is this comfort for the stay-at-homes, that their Master will certainly find something for them to do. "But I don't want to spend my life in petty things!" Stop! Don't *want*? A servant should want nothing but to know and do his Lord's will ; and nothing is petty that He sets His servants to. The greatness of the Master makes every part of His work to be great.

Some however are stay-at-homes because they *must* be so, from ill-health, or weakness, or some other circumstances beyond their control. But God has control over all. Because you are ill or weak, because you must stay at home while others go about—because of this are you no servant of His? Oh, yes, you are His servant, if you have given Him your heart ; you are as much His servant as the healthiest and strongest, only your service is different. Paul was Christ's servant, and Carpus was Christ's servant. If you cannot go about with Paul, you can keep a cloak with Carpus ; if you cannot *speak* the Word, you can *guard* it.

As Timothy was to be especially mindful to bring the parchments, so doubtless Carpus had been charged to keep them with special care. This was his duty for the time. All who have to do

with the Word of God have an honourable employment. Our great societies for producing and spreading the Bible—the Christian Knowledge Society and the Bible Society—are doing God service; and all their members and supporters, and all who are employed in the work (whether paid or unpaid)—translators, printers, binders, warehousemen, salesmen, distributors—are, in different ways, doing work of the same kind as Carpus did. He kept the parchments safe, and had them ready for Paul when he wanted them; and these Societies and these various persons are likewise important helpers in the work of the Gospel.

The missionary (Paul was a missionary) without the Bible would be like a soldier without weapons; the preacher without the Bible would have nothing to preach. “Especially the parchments;” before all other books and all other things, the Book of God. Let all think it an honour to follow in our Master’s steps, who said to His Father in heaven, “I have given them Thy word” (John xvii. 14); but, while helping to give it to others, let none neglect it for themselves. Carpus kept the sacred rolls for Paul’s use; let none keep their Bible, safe and clean it may be, but unused, and gathering dust on the shelf. “Especially the parchments:” of all the books on the shelf, let the Bible be most often taken down.



THE ELECT LADY, AND HER CHILDREN.

THE second and third Epistles of St. John, though inspired, are more like private letters than most of the other inspired writings. The second is addressed to "the elect lady, and her children."

Who she was, or where she lived, we do not know. Some think that the Greek word, which we render "lady," is here this lady's own name. The word is "Kurìa," or "Kyria"; it does mean *lady*, but it was also a name, and not an uncommon one. One ancient writer, Clement of Alexandria, takes the word "elect" as a proper name, and thinks she who bore it lived at Babylon—"a certain Babylonian woman, by name 'Electa.' " It is, however, a point of no great importance. The main thing is, not her name, but her character.

She was a lady of *choice* Christian character; the word *elect* has that meaning: not only was she

elect in the sense of being *chosen*—one of the elect of God—but also from her rare goodness, a *choice* person as distinguished from ordinary people.

As such John *loved* her ; and not her only, but her children too. He loved them “in the truth,” and “for the truth’s sake” ; not merely as personal friends, but as being one with him in the faith and love of God.

He writes to her from a distance, some say from Ephesus. At all events, she, it seems, was at her home (at Babylon or elsewhere) and he far away, probably travelling from place to place in the work of the Gospel. In some place which he had visited (he may have been writing from the place) he had met with some of this lady’s children—grown up sons probably, settled abroad in some business or profession, for that was as common then as it is now. And one main object of the Epistle is to send to this Christian lady the good news that her children, whom he had thus met with, were “walking in the truth.” There was not then that intercourse between places which there is now. Perhaps the mother did not at all know how her children were walking, and she was anxious about them ; it may be that at some time she had spoken to John of her anxiety. He was happy now to send her such good news. He had “rejoiced greatly” to find them “walking in the truth” ; and now he rejoiced to tell their mother of it.

David said of Ahimaaz, “He is a good man,

and cometh with good tidings" (2 Sam. xviii. 27); perhaps this lady had the same thought when this letter reached her, and with yet more reason. The writer was glad, and the reader was glad. The case is often far otherwise, when sons or daughters leave home, and go far away. Often home principles are forsaken, and home habits left off, and, when the restraints of home are removed, the young no longer walk in the truth. Sometimes, on the other hand, a son or daughter is first brought to the truth when absent from home. At home their religion was but a thing of form and habit; now they are brought under its power. *India* can tell many such a tale.

It was *some* only of the lady's children whom John had thus met with; the rest were at home. Them he joins with their mother in his greeting; but now he can say of the whole family, those at home and those abroad, "whom I love in the truth," for all were partakers of the same grace, and walked in the same truth. And all who knew the truth loved them. That was a happy family indeed!

But even this was not all. The letter ends thus: "the children of thine elect *sister* greet thee" (verse 13). Who was this sister, and where? Some say that John meant the *church* of the place whence he wrote; but this seems unnatural. It is more reasonable to suppose that Kyria (if that was her name) actually had a sister and her children living in that place, or *children* only of a sister,

nephews and nieces. It is more natural to think this than that St. John meant a *spiritual* sister, a sister in the faith. Here therefore we find another "elect sister" in the same family, and her children (the mother may have been dead) sending a loving message to their aunt, and in such a form as shows them to have been, like her own children, "walking in the truth." Thus the circle has widened. In one place lived "the elect lady" and some of her children; in another others of her children; and either in that same place, or in another still, the children of the lady's sister, if not the sister herself; and all these were partakers in the same faith, all walking in the truth.

Grace is not hereditary, and faith does not go by families. Grace and faith are individual, the gift of God to each person. Yet we find some families in which one member after another receives grace from above, until at last not one is wanting from the Christian band. Why should we wonder at this? If the same means have been used, may not the same results be looked for? May it not be hoped, and even expected, that, while prayer is still made and faith exercised, one child after another of the same godly parents will, in God's own time and way, be brought to Him?

Besides, one brother or sister, brought to God, will have an influence on the rest. Great is the influence of a holy and consistent life in a house! Brothers and sisters often find it hard to speak to one another on the things of God; the very near-

ness of their relationship makes the difficulty; some *parents* even have felt the same: but, without words, or with very few, and those rarely spoken, they who live under the same roof may be won by a godly life. In some cases the influence spreads yet further; and kinsfolk at a distance, hearing of a change in some they love far away, are led to search into the cause, and themselves experience the same change. The children of "the elect lady," and the children of her elect sister, were *cousins*: He who sets us in families is sometimes graciously pleased that a cousin should be the means of leading a cousin to the knowledge and love of Him.

But, joyfully as St. John owns the grace that showed itself in this family, he yet sees it necessary to exhort and warn. He exhorts to mutual love, and to obedience to God's commandments; and further, he warns against error. Many deceivers had already entered into the world, men whose unbelief and false teaching cut at the very root of the truth, so that St. John says of such an one, "this is a deceiver and an antichrist": against such he gives warning. His words are remarkable. "Look to *yourselves*," he says, "that *we* lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (verse 8). "*We* (that is, I, John, and others) have brought you to the knowledge of the truth; now do *ye*, Kyria and your children, take care that *we*, your teachers, lose not that full reward of grace which will be

bestowed on those who turn a sinner from the error of his ways." We are reminded of 1 Cor. iii. 12-15. Should she and her children be led astray, and prove in the end but wood, hay, stubble, John would suffer loss, though he himself should be saved.

This lady was evidently a person of position, a leading Christian woman in the place in which she lived. As such, she was in the habit of receiving into her house any preachers or teachers who came from a distance. But St. John exhorts her not to receive all indiscriminately, but to make sure of the character and teaching of those who should come. Some of those deceivers of whom he wrote so much might arrive. Let her not receive them. They might be plausible in manner and speech; but let her not be imposed upon. Before she took them in, let her ascertain what doctrine they brought; and, should it not be according to the truth, let her refuse to help and further them.

But would not this be inhospitable and unkind? Let none charge *John* with unkindness—John, the very Apostle of love! It is but a spurious charity that is not founded on truth, and these men were enemies to the truth. Every disciple of Christ must, before all things, be faithful to *Him*; to receive "an antichrist" would be an act of unfaithfulness. "The elect lady" must not even bid such an one "God speed," lest she should be "a partaker of his evil deeds."

Those who (like Gaius, and the Shunamite, and

like this lady) entertain the servants of God, are helpers in their work ; there are many such helpers, and they are not forgotten before God, for they give more than "a cup of cold water"; but they who entertain the opposers of the Gospel do themselves become opposers. Better to be called by men "narrow-minded," than to be classed by God among His opposers. Better to be unpopular with some men than unfaithful to God and His truth. At any other time, should even the teachers of error be in want, by all means let them receive help ; but when they come on the actual business of teaching error, a line must be drawn. The help that the Gospel commands in the one case, it forbids in the other.

Should a thief be found by the roadside with a broken limb, by all means act towards him the part of the Good Samaritan ; but if you see him breaking into a house, are you to lend him a helping hand ? And what is a teacher of error but a *thief* ? For he tries to rob us of that which is "more precious than rubies," the truth of God.



DEMETRIUS.

OUR Lord said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you" (Luke vi. 26). All spoke well of *Demetrius*; yet no woe is denounced against him; on the contrary, he is mentioned by St. John with the highest praise, "Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself; yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true" (3 John 12). How are we to reconcile this seeming contradiction?

The cases are not really alike. The "all men" who "speak well" in the first, are very different from the "all men" who reported well of Demetrius; and their reasons for speaking well are not the same.

In the first instance, our Lord was addressing His disciples, and the "all men" He mentions were *not* disciples, but the world in general. He had just said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company,

and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (Luke vi. 22, 23). Now He says, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets" (ver. 26). The speakers were the same—worldly and unbelieving men, the descendants in character as well as birth of those who in the times before them praised the false prophets and persecuted the true. So these "all men" would revile Christ's disciples "for the Son of man's sake," because of their faithfulness to Him; on the other hand, should they be unfaithful to Him, and shun the reproach of the cross, and love the praise of men more than the praise of God, then the world would love them, and "all men" would speak well of them. In the one case, the world would hate them but the Lord would bless them; in the other, the world would praise them, but the Lord said, "Woe unto you!"

Demetrius, on the other hand, was well spoken of, not by the unbelieving multitude, but by Christ's disciples; and that, because of his faithfulness to the truth. We know not what the world said of him, but we may well think that it did not love him; but disciples did love and speak well of him, and that "for the Son of man's sake," and because he was faithful. Not only did all who loved the Lord love him, but John himself bore witness to his

character; nay, the truth itself gave evidence in his favour, testifying as it did to his faithfulness to it. This was a very different favour from the favour of the world. There was no "woe" here, but blessing. We esteem all who suffer for Christ; we call those who have died for Him "the noble army of martyrs"; and for this very cause, that the world hated them, even to the death.

A general popularity is dangerous. It is not what the disciple of Christ has to expect; and if he is faithful, he will not find it. He ought not to wish for it. Was Jesus popular? Why then should His servant wish to be? The wish will almost certainly lead him to do what will please the world, and this will not be that which is pleasing to God, and hence will come worldly compliance and unfaithfulness to his Master. His standard of right will be lowered; the line of separation between right and wrong will be hidden, he will follow whither the world leads, for fear of displeasing it. Thus he may indeed stand well with all; but what is the word which the Lord applies to him? Not "blessed," but "woe!"

On the other hand, it is not wrong to wish to be approved and loved by the servants of God. True our main object should be to please *God* himself, and approve ourselves in His sight; but this will bring to us, as it brought to Demetrius, the esteem of the good; and this may well outweigh the disfavour of the world.

But there was something special in the case of

Demetrius. He was not merely a good and faithful man in his general character; but he is set in contrast with another man in one particular respect. Diotrophes (about whom St. John has just before been writing) was one who loved "to have the pre-eminence"; and this led him to oppose the Apostle John, setting himself up as a rival, "prating against us with malicious words," and seeking to cast out the brethren who would not submit to him¹. It is in contrast with this man that John says of Demetrius, he "hath good report of all men," all bear witness to his humble and unselfish character.

For thus we may understand the comparison drawn between the two. Diotrophes sought his own things, Demetrius the things of the Lord. Diotrophes would lead, Demetrius was willing to be servant of all. Diotrophes would thrust himself forward, Demetrius preferred to keep in the background. Diotrophes, in his pride and self-will, hindered his fellow-Christians, when they would not own him master; Demetrius was a helper of all.

Therefore he had "good report of all." Many of those who lived in the same place (perhaps Ephesus) had experienced his kindness, all knew and loved him as a humble, gentle, kind, and helpful Christian; John himself had observed his character, and perhaps experienced his kindness; his life was of a piece with the doctrines he professed, and so

¹ See *Lesser Lights*, second series, p. 314.

“the truth itself” was a standing witness in his favour.

It is not the overbearing and self-seeking who win love. They may gain followers by the power of a commanding character and a strong will ; but they win neither esteem nor affection ; and often, under a change of circumstances, they are found to be friendless and alone. But a humble Christian, unselfish and kind, ready to befriend all (while in a matter of principle he will yield to none) such a man is esteemed and loved, and has the good word of all whose good word is worth having. Popularity with the many brings a snare ; but the esteem of the good cheers, and strengthens. God will graciously give His faithful servant this encouragement. More even than that : “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his *enemies* to be at peace with him” (Prov. xvi. 7). He is blessed, even while they hate him ; but God can make them leave off hating him, and turn their hatred into goodwill.

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